A Festival of Mysticism: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Narrative Form and the Politics of Subject Formation

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Contents

[1] *Mukashi banashi* can be variously translated as folk tales, legends of long ago or folklore.

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Abstract

My research is based on the premise that, in form and content, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's short stories should be read as a challenge to Taishō (1912–26) conceptions of cultural modernity and nationhood. As artistic and political culture in the Taishō period seemed to polarise into a nativistic Culturalism (*kyōyōshugi*) on the one hand and a strident Proletarianism on the other, Akutagawa was increasingly viewed as an apolitical aesthete, a vision further entrenched after his totemic suicide in 1927. I aim to rescind this view of Akutagawa and, by focusing on the narrative and ideological connections which give coherence to his works between 1920 and 1927, I focus on those aspects of Akutagawa's work which, far from being outwith the political domain, may be seen to be fiercely critical of the Taishō ideological settlement as it was taking shape. I argue that Akutagawa was a writer who was acutely aware of the tensions which existed within Taishō society, of the burgeoning state and the development of an increasingly national subjectivity. I argue that Akutagawa was keenly interested in those narratives being produced, disseminated and naturalised in the 1910s and 20s and in their power to conscript the newly formed reading public to an ever narrower range of behaviours. Moreover, I aim to reveal Akutagawa's preoccupation with the complicity which existed between seemingly incongruous types of narrative form and the politics of subject formation. In particular we will explore Akutagawa's collision of the Realist mode with the impulse to mythologise in order to reveal a powerful narrative strategy which was able not only to define subjectivities but was also the means by which hegemonic values were embedded and become unopposable. The study

engages with four seminal texts: ‘Butōkai’ (‘The Ball’, 1920), ‘Momotarō’ (‘The Peach Boy, 1924), ‘Uma no ashi’ (‘Horselegs’, 1925) and ‘Seihō no hito’ (The Man from the West’, 1927) to explore the role of literature in the nation-building process.

Introduction to the Thesis

"A Festival of Mysticism"

> Ancient people believed that their ancestor was Adam. That is to say, they believed in the Book of Genesis. People nowadays, even Junior High School students, believe that their ancestor is actually the monkey. That is to say, they believe in the Book of Darwin. In other words, it remains the case that ancient people and people nowadays believe in books. ('Shuju no kotoba' ('A Dwarf's Words' 1923–25, ARZ13:34–35[2])

This quotation neatly articulates Akutagawa's enduring fascination with the power of narrative and the transformative effect he believed it had on the way people interact with the world. Its ability to circumnavigate "reality", whatever that might be, to create alternative truths and present them with authority was a function, the political application of which, was not lost on Akutagawa. Indeed, Akutagawa's was a view which understood the relationship between power and language long before such ideas came into common parlance. The notion that people are interpellated to different subject positions through the often oblique narratives with which they interact is the recurring idea which underpins the main premise of this thesis. I will argue that Akutagawa, unlike many of his literary peers, was not interested in ideas of truth or its representation but rather in the power of the written word to make people do things. An ironist who played with language and narrative expectations to undermine any belief in an

[2] All quotations from Japanese are mine unless otherwise indicated.

objective truth, I argue that Akutagawa should be viewed as a Modernist writer. Furthermore, in his recognition of the relationship between narrative form and subject formation, language and coercion, I argue that Akutagawa's importance lies in his very modern articulation of the politics underlying the production of cultural meaning and, perhaps more importantly, in its mystification. This was a judgment which would become more acute as the 1920s progressed and as Akutagawa became keenly aware of the closing down of discursive spaces as Japan moved increasingly towards a proto-fascistic nation state.

Our opening quotation, on the usurpation of faith in the Bible by faith in science as an index of modernity underscores, as Akutagawa saw it, the unchanging importance of faith *tout court*. In Akutagawa's eyes, how that faith is generated and sustained depends on the persuasiveness of the written word and in the strength of communal appreciation, the social normativity that the written word facilitates. As we shall see in our study, one reader's faith may be another reader's delusion but what distinguishes the one from the other is utterly extraneous to the idea itself and relies rather on whether there are others who can agree that opposing positions are heterodox[3]. There is an embrace of absurdity in Akutagawa's thinking, in his equalising juxtaposition of the Bible and the Book of Darwin, each simplistic explanation of genesis appears to be as ridiculous as the other:

> That Jehovah breathed life into a monkey on a Saturday in order to make our ancestors is a more brilliant display of faith than that of Jehovah breathing life into Adam, yet people are quite content with this conviction. (ARZ13:34–35)

[3] This exploration of delusion will frame our study of *Uma no ashi* (*Horse Legs*, 1925) in particular.

This juxtaposition and reduction to abstract ideas is a rhetorical device to which Akutagawa returns often and we will see how his is a subtle but nonetheless devastating destruction of faith in hitherto uncontested stories. For Akutagawa, belief, be it rational, spiritual or superstitious, is nothing more than a question of faith: each position as specious and subjective as the next.

In the same text Akutagawa moves from evolutionary theory to the belief in the spherical and revolutionary nature of the earth which holds despite the ignorance of modern society which has neither read nor appreciated scientific works on which such a bold claim is predicated. In the same passage he goes on to wonder about the modern and seemingly rational dismissal of ghosts, belief in which is naturally anathema to the progressive. What then can be said about the small number of maligned people who continue to claim to have seen spirits other than that they are delusional fools living in the wrong age? It is the security of our most unquestioned and strongly held beliefs that Akutagawa tries, at every turn, to make us doubt. Can belief be based on our experience and understanding? What if some beliefs lie beyond the scope of our comprehension and personal experience? Must we abdicate reason? If belief in Copernican cosmology is nothing more than a leap of faith, what distinguishes it from a belief in ancestors returning to their native home for *Obon*[4]? If faith is more a matter of cultural indoctrination and social normativity than empirical understanding, then reason has as much moral and intellectual weight as superstition. On this basis the belief that monkeys are our ancestors, that ghosts do not exist or that the Earth revolves around the sun become equally

[4] This Japanese Buddhist-Confucian custom honours the spirits of one's ancestors and has evolved into an annual ritual of family reunion during which time people return to ancestral family places, visit and clean their ancestors' graves and the spirits of ancestors are supposed to revisit the household altars.

absurd. To conclude his argument, Akutagawa cites the reception given to Albert Einstein in Japan in 1922:

> If someone thinks I'm lying he ought to look at the welcome given to Dr Einstein or his Theory of Relativity: a festival of mysticism, a ritual ceremony of solemn bafflement. Why Yamamoto is crazy about it at *Kaizō* I don't know. [5] (ARZ13:35–36)

"A festival of mysticism" seems to encapsulate Akutagawa's critical view of the modern and seemingly objective belief in science, rationality and its attendant claims to progress and is the reason we have included it in our title. With its echoes of the French revolutionary *fête de la raison*[6] organised in 1793 which saw French churches dismantled and reorganised as temples of reason only to respond to the same deep-seated need for religion, Akutagawa draws attention to the fundamental yearning of people at all times for unifying narratives. In his deft juxtaposition, he reveals rationality, "progress" and all totalising world views to be fraudulent and potentially ridiculous.

In our close study of four representational texts from 1920 to 1927, I aim to demonstrate how Akutagawa's overarching wariness of totalising narratives gains a more immediate urgency when it is read against the time in which and about which he was writing. I will argue that far from being the apolitical aesthete he has often been made out to be, only interested in a solipsistic art-for-art's-sake aesthetic, Akutagawa should be seen to pose a challenge to contemporary narratives of Japanese development in the transitional period

[5] The journal *Kaizō* sponsored Einstein to give a lecture in Kyoto in 1922 and the translation of his speech was published in the journal in 1923.
[6] festival of reason

between Meiji (1868–1912) and Taishō (1912–1926), the first two eras of the modern Japanese empire (1868–1947). This was an era of rapid change which not only saw the modernisation and westernisation of Japanese society with all its attendant anxieties and reactions but also the expansion of a military presence in East Asia. During Akutagawa's lifetime, Japan became an imperial power and a newly self-defined nation state and we will see how his work interrogates the multiple discourses on Japanese identity during this developmental period, unpicking narratives of nationhood, modernity and imperial domination based on notions of civilisational superiority. Writing in an age in which narratives about Japanese subjects became at once more accessible due to wide-spread literacy and a vigorous publishing industry and at the same time more controlled due to robust regulation and censorship, we will argue that there is an acute awareness in Akutagawa's work of the forcefulness of the written word and its ability to shape subjects' self-identification in a number of elastic ways.

Key Terms: Realism versus Modernism

In demonstrating Akutagawa's constant drawing of our attention to the constructedness of form and thereby the artifice of the seemingly natural, we qualify his writing as a kind of modernism. Donald Keene argues that those features of Akutagawa's work which would now be viewed as modernist were not understood as progressive or challenging the literary field by contemporary critics. Critics condemned Akutagawa's lack of originality and even admiring

commentators thought he was at best a mosaicist (Keene 1984, p.565). Akutagawa was scorned in his early writing career for an apparent lack of imagination and over-reliance on an established canon whether Japanese, Chinese or European (Keene 1984, p.565). As we shall see in our study, Akutagawa is a parodist, rewriting common narratives in new and radical ways. An ironist, Akutagawa seeks to juxtapose conflicting entities not only to trace the compatible but also to delineate the absurd. His is a literary style which unravels, denudes and questions afresh all manner of cultural practice. In this way we argue that he should be seen as a radical writer, far removed from the still now enduring image of an inward-looking writer, emblematic of the bourgeois circle he inhabited.

If we have attempted here to introduce the abstract importance of a modernist optics to Akutagawa's understanding of subject formation and an imperative to re-examine discourses of self-hood, then appurtenant questions of how the creation of cultural subjectivity is engineered necessarily ensue. This brings us to the fullness of our title: narrative form and the politics of subject formation. We will show how Akutagawa's experience of narrative was a disarming one in which there exists no objective truth and in which ostensibly certain cultural subjectivities are merely the constructed products of persuasive narrative devices. The four texts we have chosen and which date from 1920 to 1927 each reveals in its own way a peculiar aspect of the narrative mechanics at work in subject construction. Grouped together, they may initially seem disparate and incompatible and thematically at least appear to have little of the modernist about them. The first text seems to represent a nostalgic re-enactment of the thrill of a ball in the early days of Meiji while the second takes

as its subject matter a well-known children's tale. The third is a magical realist story of a man doomed to live with horse legs while the fourth is to all intents and purposes an autobiographical paean to Christianity. As divergent as such texts may initially appear, we will argue that they in fact complement one another with a very coherent meta-narrative thread. Each text in its own way asks epistemological questions about how we know what we think we know. In so doing we are confronted with precisely those narrative devices which brought us so skilfully and almost imperceptibly to our subject positions in order to make them seem strange and arbitrary. Globally, those rhetorical devices which Akutagawa seeks to expose, can be grouped together under the umbrella term of realism: that mode of writing which presents realities as found rather than curated. We will argue that what our reading of Akutagawa's short stories reveals is that realism, the mode of writing that was most in vogue in Japan in the 1910s and 1920s was the means by which particular subject formations were made to appear not only credible but also unopposable. As an anti-realist, Akutagawa has to be seen in broader ideological terms than those by which he has thus far been understood. To paraphrase Hayden White[7], we need to interrogate the content of the form and this is precisely what Akutagawa calls us to do.

By realism, we do not intend to call to mind the encyclopaedic social panoramas of Balzac or the other greats of the European Nineteenth Century. As Fowler reminds us, the European realist novel cannot be viewed interchangeably with the Japanese *shōsetsu* (1988, p.ix). However, where the term realism is helpful in describing the dominant mode of Japanese writing in

[7] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, The John Hopkins University Press, 1990.

the early 1900s is in the *effet de réel* enabled by the merging of the narrative voice with the narrative subject (p.x). This centring of consciousness, the convergence of the writer and the hero narrator creates the contrivance of sincerity, what Fowler famously calls the rhetoric of confession[8]. In the Japanese expression, the *shishōsestu* (I novel), literature is largely understood to be inherently referential, deriving its meaning from an extraliterary reality of which it is broadly speaking supposed to be a reliable transcription (Fowler 1988, p.xvii). The confessional, personal aspect of Japanese *shishōsestu* has been much discussed and we will show in our critical introduction how such a belief in authenticity went beyond questions of verisimilitude to express a moral stance which in time became exclusive and coercive.

Although this was not how realism was expressed in the European canon, the authority of the author's voice is where realist modes of fiction in the West and in Japan share some common ground. Both appear to have engendered a "profound faith in the narrator's creative authority and autonomous voice" (Fowler 1988, p.xi). Fowler sees that, in Japan, the creation of a credible and ostensibly unmediated world through narrative form began in earnest with the emergence in 1907 of the *shishōsetsu* with Katai's *Futon*. A mode of writing rather than a genre, the *shishōsetsu* provided a set of aesthetics that would dominate the Japanese field for the foreseeable future. Fixed on a single subjectivity, seemingly truthful and credible, the *shishōsetsu* was an important mode that became the dominant Japanese literary form of the early twentieth century. It appeared coherent and expressive of reality but was a reality endowed with powerful moral sanction. This, I will argue, is precisely the conceit

[8] Edward Fowler, 1988: *The Rhetoric of Confession:* Shishōsetsu *in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction*, The University of California Press.

that Akutagawa was at pains to illuminate. Not only did Akutagawa choose not to write in the realist, *shishōsetsu* mode that was the favoured form of his literary peers but he was at pains to write against it, as his modernist, short stories amply demonstrate. Akutagawa's writing is subversive, parodic and anti-realist. Our reading of his short stories proves how realities can be rewritten and, in the rewriting, he undermines the very authority of realist writing itself. In short, our study shows how Akutagawa exposes the narrative form of power in fictional modes and unravels its methodology as the basis of its will to knowledge.

Akutagawa's drive to parody the dominant realist literary form is more than merely playful. It does not seek to replace one expression of identity politics with another, equally compelling version. In his insistence on the correlation between narrative and subject formation, he brings to our attention germane questions of power and cultural politics. His subjects respond to and produce alternative narratives. His subjects wittingly or unwittingly undermine knowledge which has hitherto been taken for granted. His subjects are not the unified "hero" narrators of contemporary novels, they are often as baffled by their own reality as their narrator. Short stories demand an acceleration and distillation of message which is partly why Akutagawa's writing is so forceful and also why it stands in opposition to the world view created by the novels of his peers. In creating versions of reality which convert the reader to particular behavioural dispositions, realism may be seen as a mode of writing which acts as an instrument of social engineering. Akutagawa shows us how this mode operates in order to diminish its power.

Moreover, Akutagawa's work demonstrates how the realist mode goes beyond the realm of fiction to permeate many types of modern narrative. This is why his interest in history and historiography is so important. If it is now axiomatic that the writing of history (re-)creates versions of reality then it follows that the more persuasive the writing, the more persuaded the reader in a specific version of the past. Akutagawa saw that a realist aesthetics operated in historical writing just as it operated in fiction. Both modes shared a will to power that was disguised by a seemingly objective aesthetics. Indeed, the writing of history in Japan in the 1910s and 1920s, rather than having an ontological imperative of its own, was part of a wider cultural apparatus that sought to direct the progress of the nation and of the empire. The Japanese presentation of history in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries created a vision of the present in which the justification of empire was at least implicit. It is precisely this state-driven cultural policy which sought to define cultural practice in ever more narrowly orthodox channels, that Akutagawa exposes. We will see this for example in the ideological indoctrination of imperial subjects as children through the dissemination of state-sanctioned folk tales such as that of 'The Peach Boy'. This expropriation and adaptation of aspects of folk history and myth was part of the state's narrative arsenal to construct those subject positions amenable to newly state-sanctioned ideologies.

This appropriation of native stories and redirection by the state will be investigated at length in our critical introduction as we explore the shift from Meiji concepts of *bunmei* (civilisation) to Taishō ideas of *bunka* (culture) and its attendant move towards a proto-fascistic understanding of Japanese self-hood. In the four chosen texts studied in depth we will see a fierce criticism of the

ideological settlement of the Taishō era and its cultural politics, namely, the construction of nationalised subjects via state-sponsored narratives and reinvented myths that worked on both narrative and affective levels to conscript the public in the project of imperial modernity.

Genesis of the Thesis and Literature Review

The inception of this thesis stems from the disconnect that exists between my understanding of Akutagawa and his representation over time by literary critics. I read Akutagawa as an anti-realist modernist, bitingly satirical and critical of the political and cultural apparatus he sees around him. Yet as we explore the role of literature and the newly formed reading public in shaping national identities, Akutagawa seems to be at once noticeably absent and unduly important.

On the one hand, as a short story writer, Akutagawa does not loom large in the accepted prescription for understanding the connection between literature and Taishō identity politics partly because of the enduring focus on the realist novel as an index of modernity which itself stems from the Meiji cultural settlement. Akutagawa wrote no full-length novels but over one hundred and fifty short stories and articles. The 1997 edition of his complete works (ARZ) comprises twenty-four volumes and is the edition we shall refer to here. As a writer of short fiction rather than of novels, Akutagawa stands at odds with the majority of his literary peers. The enduring pre-eminence of the novel beyond Meiji can be seen in the later Taishō derogation of Akutagawa's insistence on pursuing non-novelistic forms. Tanizaki for example famously pitted the so-

called anaemic short story against what he saw to be the majestic full-length novel (Karatani 1993, p.161) thereby continuing and strengthening the Meiji valorisation of the novel. Benedict Anderson has illuminated the role of the novel in providing the technical means for representing the kind of imagined community that is the nation (discussed in Seiji Lippit 1997, p.42). We will argue that the fact that Akutagawa chose not to write in novelistic form is indicative of his misgivings about the conventions of narrative fiction and the hegemonic narrative of national identity under construction in the 1910s and 1920s.

On the other hand, Akutagawa's work is always invoked in the contested ground between an uneasy cosmopolitanism and the recuperative politics of cultural nationalism which dogged the 1920s and 1930s. Abjected by "engaged" critics like Kobayashi Hideo for being a stubborn intellectual *à la* Gourmont because he apparently refused to be drawn into the perceived division between bourgeois and proletarian writing, Akutagawa was subsequently recovered as a quintessentially Japanese poet (Anderer 1995, p.101). Writing for example in the 1927 piece *The Muse and the Fate of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke* for instance critic Kobayashi Hideo was to remark:

> Akutagawa clung stubbornly to the intellectualism of the Gourmont and Anatole France […] But I thought he should have had a more vital and intense, a higher-speed intellectualism. […] Were I to read him again today, how would I react? Perhaps I would be surprised to discover in Akutagawa a traditional Japanese poet. (Anderer 1995, p.101)

His suicide in 1927 became for many a metaphor for the passing of the Taishō cosmopolitan project and the beginning of the so-called cultural revival which began to view Akutagawa's work in a more sympathetic but no less ideological light. The renewal of interest in Akutagawa's work began in earnest in the 1930s and in 1935 Kikuchi Kan established the Akutagawa Prize to memorialise the writer's work.

A metafictional intrigue may be seen in Akutagawa's various discursive emplotments which are clearly a product of the ideological landscape of the 1910s, 1920s and beyond. Imagined by turns as a cosmopolitan universalist and as a narrowly Japanese aesthetic culturalist, it is clear that rather like the concept of culture itself, Akutagawa has been used to signify many of the tensions inherent in competing notions of Japanese modernity. We shall explore this trajectory in more depth in our critical introduction. To summarise briefly here, one such construction emplots the Akutagawa discourse as comedy in its view of a writer who celebrates the universal conservation of shared human values against the threat of modern disruption. Satō Haruo (1892–1964) for instance saw Akutagawa as an exemplary Taishō intellectual whose apparent mission of self-cultivation could reach beyond cultural divisions to a universal vision of modernity (1975, p.46)[9].

Similarly, Karatani argues that while the Taishō discursive space may appear cosmopolitan, it was actually complacent and insular (1993, p.168) and that consequently Akutagawa's consistent drawing on western as well as Japanese and Chinese classics enabled his position as a universalist which

would lead both to his celebration and his denigration. More recently, we could cite David Rosenfeld's reading of 'The Ball' (2000) as indicative of a view which embraces the cosmopolitan and the ease with which Akutagawa engages with a universalist approach to cultural practice. Rebecca Suter also presents Akutagawa's engagement with *Kirishitan mono* (Christian Stories) as ample evidence of the writer's fascination with aligning representations of national past and foreign culture in Taishō Japan (2013).

On the other hand, Seiji Lippit sees two sides to Akutagawa's work: the first is as the expression of the ideology of self-cultivation "which placed almost limitless faith in the value of literature and in 'culture' generally" (2002, p.41). The second moves Akutagawa from the emplotment of comedy to that of tragedy, engendered by the loss of coherence or unity of literary practice towards a fundamental questioning of the basis of literary expression. This writing of Akutagawa as part of a narrative of tragedy has been more dominant in literary criticism and casts Akutagawa in an irreconcilable conflict with the world as it is, lamenting the loss of artistic purity in its collision with a debased mass culture. Akutagawa's suicide was interpreted by many as the defeat of an intellectualised practice which viewed literature as existing outwith the social and historical realm. Tsuruta Kinya remarked in 1972 that Akutagawa's suicide has been central to studies of the writer's work, guaranteeing his posthumous popularity while delineating the parameters of critical approach (p.112). Noriko Mizuta Lippit articulates a similar metaphor when she writes that Akutagawa's suicide was symbolic of the death of the intellectualism and aestheticism that had apparently characterised his work (1980, p.10). This metaphoric view was strengthened by the ending of the Taishō era in 1926 and the beginning of the

Shōwa just as it coincided with the apotheosis of Marxist literary criticism which lauded the end of bourgeois writing of which Akutagawa apparently represented an irredeemable exemplar. Roy Starrs expresses the abiding image of Akutagawa:

> Taishō writers such as Akutagawa Ryūnosuke are remarkably inward-looking, almost exclusively concerned with their own psychological states, seemingly uninterested in the state of the nation as a whole (1998, p.214).

The fall from favour in the 1930s of the proletarian writers who had excoriated Akutagawa for an apparent lack of social responsibility heralded a revision of Akutagawa's reputation as a writer of "pure literature" and hence secured his entrance to the national canon (S. Lippit 1997, p.263). His suicide was seen to foreshadow the 1930s' revision of the Taishō and a reformulation of cultural identity away from the so-called cosmopolitanism of the 1920s. The creation of the Akutagawa Prize for fiction in 1935 and the inclusion of the author's early writings on the school curriculum in Japan helped launch him as a national writer and has ensured that he has been prolifically translated (Tsuruta 1972, p.112). Indeed, in his introduction to the anthology of stories published by Penguin Classics in 2006, Murakami Haruki hails Akutagawa as a "Japanese national writer", fundamental to a common Japanese identity and culture (p.xx). Such canonisation of Akutagawa as a national writer is a singularly historical act, prompted by hindsight, cultural nostalgia and the need to rewrite the pre-war past. Murakami's quotation deftly encapsulates the metaphoric sense in which

Akutagawa's suicide has been made to symbolise the end of a golden era and herald the beginning of fascism:

> Many Japanese would see in the death of this one writer the triumph, the aestheticism, the anguish and the unavoidable downfall of the Taishō Period's cultivated elite. His individual declaration of defeat also became a signpost on the road of history leading to the tragedy of the Second World War. In the period just before and after his death, the flower of democracy that had bloomed with such promise in the Taishō Period simply shrivelled and died. Soon the boots of the military would resound everywhere. The writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke stands as an illuminating presence in the history of Japanese literature, a symbol of his age's brief glory and quiet defeat." (Murakami 2006, p.xxxiii)

Yet the aestheticism praised by Murakami was not always something to be lauded during Akutagawa's lifetime, particularly during his later years and immediately following his death. Miyamoto Kenji for example in his award-winning essay *Haiboku no bungaku* (*The Literature of Defeat*, 1929) sketched an invective of the writer's suicidal end as the inevitable culmination of his aberrant writings: the antithesis of the national genre that was the *watakushi-shōsetsu* (N. Lippit 1980, p.66).

Why then was there such a volte-face in critical opinion less than a decade later with the creation of the Akutagawa prize in 1935? Only at the end of the 1920s when the critics of Marxism moved to distil a "pure" Japanese culture from its blend of western and indigenous forms did critics revisit Akutagawa's work in a more generous light.

Thus it was that Akutagawa's suicide became a supremely textual act, read first as the cowardly act of the self-obsessed bourgeois who admitted the defeat of his inward-looking aesthetic, then as the metaphor for a nation struggling to articulate its identity amongst the conflicting forces of Marxism and westernisation. That Akutagawa came to be seen as a "traditional Japanese poet" a writer of "pure literature" is indicative of the critical tenor of the 1930s and beyond.

Critics understood the so-called "plotless novel debate" with Tanizaki in 1927 to mean that Akutagawa was a writer of "pure literature", a guardian of poetic style rather than an avant-garde artist and satirist (N. Lippit 1980, p.62). Roy Starrs went so far as to say:

> Unlike Ōgai […] Akutagawa's intention was not to present an image of national life in a particular historical period but rather to present a timeless psychological truth in an aesthetically satisfying form […] he was a Taishō aesthete disguised as a Meiji national writer (Starrs 1998, p.220).

Furthermore, as has already been noted, the writer's suicide meant that both his writings and his life were viewed as defeatist and, ultimately as a metaphor for a nostalgic age. In these ways and almost in spite of itself, I would argue, Akutagawa's work has been viewed as the performance of a conservative narration of national identity.

Recent interrogations of hegemonic national narratives by studies of modernist and subaltern fiction have prompted some scholars to view Akutagawa in a more critical light. Studies by Susan Napier (1996) and Seiji Lippit (2002) for example have highlighted the subversiveness of form and

language in Akutagawa's writings to problematise presentations of Taishō cultural identity. The use of language undermined the ideology of transparency of the *genbun ichi* (the unification of the spoken and the written language[10]), part of the nation-building operation called for by, for example, Tsubouichi (p.8). Lippit argues that the dislocation of the novel as the national genre and the ultimate disintegration of form opened up heterogeneous topographies at the margins of the nation state (2002, p.7). He sees Akutagawa as a writer for whom literature had previously organised an entire world and which provided access to a kind of universality (pp.52-53). Lippit sees that the coherent consciousness that ensued, a modern universal culture mediated through literature, disintegrates in his later writing. His last works expose the insuperable gap between writing and experience and therefore a breakdown of consciousness (p.54). The narrator's mental collapse in 'Haguruma' ('Cogwheels', 1927) is signified by a breakdown of his linguistic capacity and by the eruption of foreign languages in his consciousness (pp.57-58). What previously had signalled an expansive universalism is now seen as a painful cacophony.

Other critics have sought to reinvest Akutagawa more squarely within the native tradition of interrogating teleological mythmaking in early twentieth-century Japan. By focusing on intertextuality and self-reflexiveness, critics argue that Akutagawa's works interrogate cultural memory and the authority of the historical record while also revealing the fallacy of cultural "essence".

[10] For more on the *Genbun ichi* movement, see Tomasi, 1999: 'Quest for a New Written Language: Western Rhetoric and the Genbun Itchi Movement', *Monumenta Nipponica*, 54:3, pp.333–36.

Recent critics have begun to engage with the notion that Akutagawa was more socially and politically engaged than the enduring Shōwa depiction has allowed. While still adopting an essentially biographical approach, Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi has demonstrated the ways in which Akutagawa was keenly involved in the political and social thinking of his day[11]. Sekiguchi underlines many instances of Akutagawa's historical awareness. He notes for instance that in the summer of 1923 Akutagawa spent a month in Karuizawa reading works by Wilhelm Liebknecht, Karl Marx and, he assumes, Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution* (1999, p.473). Citing Akutagawa's 1920s' writing on proletarian works and on socialism, Sekiguchi builds a picture of a very politically and socially engaged writer. He notes that while international research has tended to focus on the writer's historical awareness, such an approach has not generally been embraced in Japanese scholarship (2004, p.137). He goes on to explain his intention to explode the Akutagawa myth in line with post Cold-War thinking and cites the changing image of Akutagawa in Japan as evidence of an invigorated discursive field.

Fujii Takashi's *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke: Fuan no shosō to bigaku ideorogi* (*Akutagawa Ryūnosuke: Aspects of Anxiety and Aesthetic Ideology*, 2010) begins with the criticism that until now Taishō literary research has not been undertaken from a coherent theoretical aesthetic-ideological perspective but rather from a strictly *geijitsu shijōshūgi* (art-for-art's-sake) perspective. Fujii's intention is not to reduce Akutagawa to the position of a private individual in the biographical vein but rather to view him as fundamentally connected to what he

[11] See in particular Sekiguchi 1999, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to sono jidai* (*Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and his Times*) and 2004, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke no rekishi ninshiki* (*Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's Historical Awareness*).

sees as a wide-ranging sense of “crisis” (p.13). This new approach is refreshing and, as I hope to demonstrate in my own study, will allow for new insights into the cultural and political landscape of the Taishō period which have hitherto been overlooked.

We will explore at length Akutagawa’s engagement with *shishōsetsu* literary theory in our critical introduction but we preface this analysis with a word about the biographical preoccupation of the Meiji and Taishō literary field. In a genre in which the confessional was paramount, criticism has tended to invest more in biographical correlation than in most other literary fields. Even the contemporary critic Seiji Lippit who views Akutagawa as a precursor to the Modernism proper of Yokomitsu *et al* constructs what he sees as the disintegration in Akutagawa’s later works of mechanisms of subjectivity as the result of his descent into delusional paranoia thereby refreshing the significance of the personal. One of Akutagawa’s most frequently criticised works in Japanese scholarship is the 1927 work ‘Seihō no hito’ (‘The Man from the West’). This is almost always conducted from the vantage point of Akutagawa’s own position of faith or lack thereof, particularly as he contemplated the ending of his life. Doak who refreshes our understanding by reprising and analysing various Japanese critical approaches to this work notes the prevalence even now in the Japanese field of autobiographical interpretation. He sees that this may be part of an attempt to discover the literary self-affirmation of a solitary, tormented writer whose fascination with Christ merely reflects the writer’s own increasingly dark, suicidal impulses. Even in his 2011 survey and translation Doak declared that his aim was to show how Akutagawa’s interest in Christianity was not merely

cultural or “aesthetic”, but deep and serious in order to shed further light on his tragic suicide (p.248). It seems that the metafictional narrative of Akutagawa’s suicide still precludes other readings of the author’s life and works than that of tragedy.

Another reason why Akutagawa’s work has been occluded from more radical readings of other literatures from his age is, I will argue, his choice of the short story. We have touched upon the hegemonic position accredited by literary criticism to the modern (“Western”) novel, in particular the Japanese genre of the I-novel (*watakushi shōsetsu* or the *shishōsetsu*). The cultural pre-eminence accorded to the novel in Meiji and Taishō partly explains the lack of critical engagement and the vicissitudes of Akutagawa’s standing within the Japanese literary canon. If Tanizaki doubted the force of the short story writer, this is partly because he had internalised the generic hierarchies related to literature which dominated his age. Caught in the logic of mimesis, critics were also at times puzzled by Akutagawa’s writing which seemed to trick them, such was its convincing verisimilitude. We shall see for instance how readers felt bamboozled by the ending to the work ‘Hōkyōnin no shi’ (‘Death of a Martyr’, 1918) in which the narrator claims to present as true a fabricated legend from the Japanese *Legenda Aurea* which was published in the Nagasaki Church.

Urged to discard his literary pretensions and embrace the modernity of verisimilitude, Akutagawa was not initially viewed as a modern national writer. Indeed Kume Masao informed him that “the true path of the art of prose is the *watakushi-shōsetsu*” (Keene 1984, p.575). Akutagawa rejected the vogue of the *watakushi-shōsetsu*, asserting that “to be honest or not to deceive others is not an issue of any literary law but simply a question of moral law” (quoted in

Tsuruta 1970, p.22). He recognised the implications of the *watakushi-shōsetsu*: an unquestioning and unquestioned presentation of ideology, the pernicious potential inherent in the confusion of ethics and aesthetics.

In the reconfiguration of Akutagawa as a national narrator, it is often assumed that he turned away from a fragmented consciousness of modernity towards a neurotic acceptance of the *watakushi-shōsetsu* in his final years (Keene 1984, p.576). Even Seiji Lippit who views Akutagawa's later works as that of an ultra-modernist remarks that his final works are a recognition of the inevitably total disintegration of form, the destruction of the novel paralleled by his ultimate self-destruction (S. Lippit 1999, p.48). The only avenues open to him, if we are to read 'Aru ahō no isshō' ('The Life of a Stupid Man', 1927) were "madness or suicide" (p.49). In this work the almost painful intimacy we feel with the protagonist through the quasi-confessional style is subverted by an ironic distancing of narration through the third person. The result is a sense of the grotesqueness of the self and the awkwardness with which we try to narrate our innermost feelings and anxieties.

This initial survey of literary criticism shows how Akutagawa's writings have perversely been viewed as both the subversion and the performance of the nation as narration. Tsuruta remarked in 1970 that Akutagawa had been extensively translated but little criticised. Excessive focus on the importance of the mimetic tradition in the national genre that was the *watakushi-shōsetsu* relegated Akutagawa to the conventional standing of story-teller, especially of children's fiction. His later and seemingly more radical works are still now approached biographically, either with a view to explain his suicide as is the

case with ‘The Man from the West’ and ‘Cogwheels’ or to understand the move towards modernism understood as the disintegration of subjectivity.

This thesis aims to stand apart from such readings of Akutagawa in order to present a writer who, far from being an apolitical aesthete who only later despairingly acknowledged the discursiveness of culture formation, was in fact profoundly engaged with the cultural politics of his time. The prevalent critical view suggests a movement from confidence in the *watakushi shōsetsu* as national project through to modernist experimentation and the questioning of cultural boundaries to the *Nihon e no kaiki* (Return to Japan) of the 1930s and subsequent questioning of the notion of the nation in Shōwa literature. In positioning Akutagawa’s later works as a prequel to the “modernism proper” of Yokomitsu and Kawabata, Akutagawa is seen to hover somewhere between embracing the novel and conceptualising the modernist project while the ideological engagement of his early works is undervalued.

The very textuality of his *œuvre*, his consciously relativist approach to European, Chinese and Japanese literatures can be seen, I will argue, to complicate the notion of cultural equality with the West while also mocking the ideas of Taishō culturalism and a coherent national identity. The association of Taishō with culture, modernity and democracy glosses over deep-seated anxieties concerning the very concept of the imagined community that was the nation and with which Akutagawa remains preoccupied. I aim to demonstrate that within Akutagawa’s works we can perceive a modernist meta-narrative of canon formation which highlights the role of literature in the nation-building process. His are radical subjects, endowed with their own will and able to resist or rebel and who do not accept mapping passively. We will show how

Akutagawa contested various and diverse forms of imposed authority including faith as well as political, cultural and historical authority.

Methodology

As a writer who made frequent reference to such critical commentators as Wilde (1854–1900), Nietzsche (1844–1900), Heine (1797–1856) and Kropotkin (1842–1921), I will argue that Akutagawa was himself profoundly interested in the production of cultural meaning and, more importantly, in its mystification. He was also a supremely literary figure who was as well read in western literature as he was in Chinese and Japanese works. As such, the study necessarily operates on several levels simultaneously. It explores the ways in which meaning is generated within the four texts studied and also necessarily engages closely with those texts explicitly or implicitly referred to by Akutagawa. This necessitates a close engagement with Akutagawa's work as well as those works which formed an active part of his own intellectual and aesthetic landscape. To that end the study operates on a literary and literary-historical level to explore Akutagawa's contribution as a modernist, anti-realist writer. Moreover, this is a study which aims not only to interrogate the intersections between the literary and the historical but also to explore broader discursive formations. To this end my approach will be diachronic and metahistorical, drawing on historical, textual and Cultural Studies analysis in order to make wider conclusions about how hegemonic meaning is generated, disseminated, sustained and, possibly, opposed.

I will engage with a number of primary and secondary sources in order to discern an ambivalent figure who sits uncomfortably with Japan's nascent Fascist political ideology, including the atrocities it committed in China and elsewhere in East Asia and the attendant social engineering of Japanese subjects. Given the retraction of discursive spaces in Japan as the 1920s progressed and as censorship practices became more pronounced, this cultural politics can, at times, only be detected through reading between the lines and in Akutagawa's subtle play with form, narrative, mode of representation and with focus on literature as performance with inherent performativity.

The rationale behind the choice of Akutagawa texts will be discussed presently. We will then outline those secondary sources, both Japanese and western, that have the most bearing on our study. We will also briefly articulate the theoretical approaches which have most shaped this study.

Choice of Texts

The study is organised by a chronological survey of four representative texts written between 1920 and 1927. It is hoped that this chronological presentation will allow for a deeper understanding of the development of Akutagawa's cultural concerns over time. The key texts which command their own chapters are 'Butōkai' ('The Ball', 1920), 'Momotarō' ('The Peach Boy', 1923), 'Uma no ashi' ('Horse Legs', 1925) and 'Seihō no hito' ('The Man from the West', 1927).

Each text is explored on its own terms for the narrative ways in which message is conveyed but each reading leads naturally to the narrative thematics of the next text so that there develops a coherent and discernible

meta-narrative thread which allows us to make wider conclusions about Akutagawa's literary practice over time. For instance we will argue that our engagement with 'The Ball' is fundamental for all other readings since it presents a mode of encounter with and an apprehension of the world which relies on mediation rather than direct experience. This is the basis for what we shall understand as Akutagawa's modernist optics and which in this first text dismantles notions of coherent national subjectivities. Equipped with this initial understanding of the fabrication of national narratives through romance, our exploration of 'The Peach Boy' analyses the practice of appropriating national myths and the institutionalised writing of history in order to forge, propagate and enforce modern imperial identities. This top-down process is revealed to be artificial and in fact sinister, part of the social engineering agenda of the state to co-opt newly nationalised subjects to the imperial project. If 'The Peach Boy' presents the ideological underpinnings of the imperial strategy, then our analysis of 'Horse Legs' reveals the tensions and psychic strain inherent in this newly enforced modern identity. Positing a mode of behaviour based on an acceptance of modern consumerism, relations of labour and capital and their concomitant alienation from nature and the self, this text explores the oppressive ways in which modern cultural practice demands acquiescence to its own forms of mental and physical slavery. Our final chapter on 'The Man from the West' in many ways encapsulates Akutagawa's global artistic vision and expands on those ideas about narrative and cultural practice developed in previous texts. It reprises ideas of ideational conscription through affective narrative. It transposes one mythical text with a historically situated telos to a culturally alien place and time to expose the absurdity of its intrinsic message

and to question our understanding of universalism. Rather than seeing iconology and religious rhetoric as anti-modern, it understands the religious mode as absolutely fundamental to modernity. The need of modern society to unite reading subjects with close affective and identarian ties is seen to underlie the cultural settlement as it existed in a Japan moving ever closer to fascist modes of existence.

In addition to these four main texts which act as a focus point from which we may explore narrative and ideological development, a number of other Akutagawa texts will be referred to in depth to further illuminate our understanding of the situatedness of main ideas. Two principal texts in particular will help us to understand Akutagawa's critical interaction with the world around him. 'Hekigen' ('Subjective Portraits', 1924) and 'Shuju no kotoba' ('A Dwarf's Words' 1923–5) are not stories but rather act as a space in which Akutagawa may explore ideas pertaining to narrative form, function and the wider intersection of narrative consumption, cultural practice and politics.

'Subjective Portraits' comprises a series of essays which treat the influence of popular narrative on the reading public, particularly those concerned with national allegory and myth making. A feature published in the magazine *Josei kaizō* between March and August 1924, the author had the freedom to choose a Japanese cultural figure to write about in each instalment. Akutagawa chose three iconic Japanese figures: Iwami Jutarō, Saitō Mokichi and Kimura Kenkadō[12]. Akutagawa's analysis of the Iwami Jutarō myth will be

[12] Saitō Mokichi (1882-1953) was a poet and psychiatrist and was Akutagawa's family doctor. He prescribed the barbiturate Veronal of which Akutagawa took an overdose in July 1927. Kimura Kenkadō 1736–1802 was a Japanese scholar, artist and art connoissuer. Respected as a gifted landscape painter of

particularly instructive as we focus on the power of mythologisation in shaping subject formation. A semi-legendary figure reported to have fought in Toyotomi Hideyoshi's service and to have died in the siege of Osaka Castle in 1615 (Henry 2009, p.100), the real history of Iwami Jutarō pales into insignificance for Akutagawa when it is compared to his imaginative reincarnations in those popular tales endlessly retold in oral storytelling, kabuki, and books.[13] In 'Subjective Portraits', far from being erudite and effete, Akutagawa collides Japan's founding myths as found in the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*, 712) and 'The Peach Boy' with samurai movie heroes (*chanbara*) and American adventure film actors like Hurricaine Hutch to reveal a disparate mode of narration which supports Japanese colonial ambitions. It is a very compelling articulation of Akutagawa's understanding of the palimpsestic nature of cultural formation and of the power of the imagination over the reading public. It also reveals how popular and seemingly inoffensive icons can be conscripted to wider ideological ends. These ideas will be explored in full in our chapter on 'The Peach Boy'. Elsewhere it engages thoughtfully with those tensions within notions of national modernity that were being rehearsed by contemporaries, namely the relationship between Japanese culture and western culture in which anxieties of imitation and debasement were palpable. In a sweeping survey of modern western and eastern art and literature, Akutagawa draws on a Wildean understanding of life imitating art and the necessarily universal apprehension of

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the *nanga* school, his collection was purchased by the Japanese government after his death.

[13] Henry (2009, p100) explains how the tales of Iwami Jutarō's derring-do were still highly popular in Meiji Japan and cites Tayama Katai (1871-1930) who in *Tokyo no sanjūnen* (1917, *Thirty Years in Tokyo*), places tales of Iwami among the most popular reading material in circulation during his childhood in the 1890s.

the world through mediated forms. This will be crucial in our approach to 'The Ball' which sets out an Akutagawan world view in which Chinese classics converse with European playwrights over contemporary nationalist developments in Japan in order to create a cultural framework as diverse in time as it is in space.

The second text which will be intrinsic to our study is 'Words of a Dwarf'. The miscellaneous collection of aphorisms was written by Akutagawa for *Bungei Shunjū*, the magazine founded by his friend Kikuchi Kan in 1923; the greater portion of it appeared in monthly instalments from January 1923 (the magazine's first issue) until November 1925. Entries are by turn critical, philosophical, and whimsical in nature and will be referred to at length in this study. A curious text, it offers an often intimate indication of Akutagawa's preoccupations at the time of writing. The author prefaced his work in the following way:

> 'Words of a Dwarf' isn't a systematic exposition of my ideas; it merely allows the changes in them to be glimpsed from time to time. Rather than a blade of grass, a vine – but one, perhaps, that puts forth many tendrils. (ARZ13:27)

The appendix comprises those entries which were not published with the others but which were found in draft and published shortly after the writer's death. It treats universal ideas like love and friendship, death and art as well as more contemporary concerns like the role and direction of proletarian literature, the impact of Marxism on political and cultural practice and Japanese imperial ambitions. Sometimes very commonplace, sometimes most profound, the piece

as a whole presents a world-view which is at once universal and particular, abstract and also precisely situated in its peculiar historical, political and cultural setting.

It is scathing in its treatment of the oppressive political atmosphere of the time, discerning fascistic tendencies in a state which looked to subjugate its people into a mode of acquiescence. It describes the militarisation and brutalisation of the nation and the aggressive attitude adopted towards China and towards non-native subjects within the empire. Its observations on the militarisation of society and the glorification of the nation's fallen through monuments like the *Yūshūkan*, the Japanese military and war museum maintained by the Yasukuni Shrine established as a paean to imperial might and national spirit are testimony to Akutagawa's understanding of the affective and monumentalising narratives underpinning the imperial project. Yet as ever, we see a juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous phenomena as Akutagawa draws parallels between the glorification of violence in the name of the state and other totalising ideologies like socialism and Christianity. In this text as elsewhere we see a writer who is acutely aware of the common ground shared by those modern narratives which conscript readers, sometimes gently, sometimes with force to prescribed subject positions.

Moreover and as we shall see presently, 'Words of a Dwarf' provides extensive commentary on a number of writers who, by his own admission, have clearly had a deep influence on Akutagawa. Japanese writers feature on this register of influence but, more importantly, it engages in much larger number with European writers, artists and thinkers. We are subsequently left with the

impression that it was this wider world beyond the confines of Japan which captured Akutagawa's attentions most forcefully.

A number of other Akutagawa texts will be cited during the course of the study to complement our reading. 'Tabako to akuma' ('Tobacco and the Devil', 1916) for instance, the hilarious and at times rather moving story of the devil whose head had been filled with romantic notions of faraway places and who travelled the world only to find that what he discovered there did not match what he had read in Marco Polo's *Travels*. This is a story which enriches our understanding of the mediated way in which Akutagawa sees that we interact with the world. 'Kaika no otto' ('An Enlightenment Husband', 1919) is another work of this period which explores the effect romanticism, that is to say the apprehension of the world through the medium of romance and novelistic form, has on subject formation. This is a work which presents a number of framed representations, either as tableaux or as iconic literary scenes or stereotypes and as such forms a pendant to 'The Ball'.

'Shōgun' ('The General', 1922)[14] acts as a pendant to 'The Peach Boy' in its scathing commentary on Japanese militarism. In many ways 'The General' is a less interesting work because it appears to be narratologically more straightforward although it is certainly thematically very daring. The story of ordinary Japanese men made soldiers and forced to fight a war they do not understand let alone support under the leadership of N. Shogun who appears to be based on the Imperial Army General Nogi, a hero of the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) was censored for references that were deemed seditious. If examples were needed of Akutagawa's critical stance towards militarism, we

[14] Published in *Kaizō*, January 1922.

need look no further than this work. Yet Akutagawa as ever collides diverse discourses which seem far removed from each other but in fact are shown to overlap. This is more easily discerned in the 1923 work 'Saru kani gassen' ('The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab', 1923) in which the brutalities of Japanese militarism are allied with their enabling force, modern capitalism. In this rewritten folk story the two quintessentially modern enterprises are symbiotically linked since modern consumer culture is revealed to be the proper accessory of colonialism since the quest for new markets becomes ever more urgent. This straddling of two principal tenets of Japanese modernity, a consumer culture based on capitalist exploitation combined with an expansionist project based on the principle of civilisational superiority brings us neatly to the next story in our study: 'Horse Legs'.

While this initial survey is by no means exhaustive, it serves to demonstrate the breadth of Akutagawa's texts which act as the basis for any observations made in the study.

Akutagawa: A Writer Steeped in Western Literature

We made the point previously that while in 'A Dwarf's Words', Akutagawa refers to some Japanese writers, the proliferation of western writers cited is testimony to the great importance the writer attaches to western literature. We also noted that at the heart of Akutagawa's vision is the concession that we interact with the world through the ideas we have already formed of it and that literature is paramount in creating and describing those ideas. It is important to note that,

like many of the characters he describes, Akutagawa never travelled to Europe or the United States.[15] Akutagawa is a writer who experiences western civilisations at one remove, through the books he reads, and his vision of modernity is always to be understood through that contorting prism. Like that of his contemporaries, his word view is undeniably steeped in the Meiji culture in which he grew up, marked by the foreign works he read and by those literary discourses which clearly influenced contemporary Japanese writing. We need only read works like 'Tobacco and the Devil', 'An Enlightenment Husband' and 'The Ball' to understand the pull of foreign literatures and the influence novelistic representations of Europe had on the Meiji reading subject. This was a world in which other cultures were apprehended through the cultural artefacts they presented and which took the place of direct experience. Romanticism was not only an imported product but a metaphor for Meiji cultural appropriation in general.

An avid reader of European literature, Akutagawa was no exception and ideas of romanticism and sentimentalism are present in many of his works as the mode by which subjects understand the world around them. Born in 1892, Akutagawa studied English Literature at Tokyo Imperial University and graduated in 1916 with a thesis on the English socialist artist and activist William Morris which was destroyed in the fire following the Great Kanto

[15] Akutagawa's only foreign trip was to China. In 1921 Akutagawa spent four months in China as a reporter for the *Osaka Mainichi Shinbun* where he met the Chinese revolutionary Zhang Taiyan and was struck by the animosity of the Chinese towards the Japanese (Sekiguchi 1999, p.415). While in China he suffered from pleurisy and his poor health forced his premature return to Japan upon which he published 'Yabu no naka' ('In a Bamboo Grove', 1922) and 'The General'. In 1923 Akutagawa wrote scathingly about the "upright citizens" of Tokyo who took advantage of the post-earthquake disarray to attack local Koreans with Police Bureau connivance (Sekiguchi 1999, p.472).

Earthquake of 1923 (Healey 1970, pp.24 and 30). Already we could argue that the relationship between literature and politics loomed large in Akutagawa's mind but sadly that thesis has not survived to be scrutinised. In 1914 Akutagawa had revived with his former high school friends Kume Masao and Kikuchi Kan the literary journal *Shinshichō* (*New Currents of Thought*), publishing translations of William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) and Anatole France (1844–1924) along with their own works (p.24).

While still a student Akutagawa published possibly his most famous story, *Rashōmon* (1915), based on a twelfth-century tale. In 1916 his work 'Hana' ('The Nose') was highly praised by Natsume Sōseki who became the young writer's mentor until his death later that year. Sōseki himself had studied English at Tokyo Imperial University and had famously spent two miserable years from 1900 in London on a government scholarship before returning to become a lecturer in English literature at Tokyo Imperial University. From his student days, Akutagawa moved in a circle which read avidly in English and had none of the qualms of later writers who felt more ambivalent about what such cultural practice might mean for their own literary and national credentials.

Our study will make frequent reference to those writers we know Akutagawa was himself reading and we will argue that accusations of straying from the Japanese field are anachronistic at best, and at worst seek to enlist Akutagawa in an essentialised Japanese project which the writer may well have found ironic. As part of my research, I spent time consulting Akutagawa's personal library held at the Museum of Modern Japanese Literature (*Nihon Kindai Bungakukan*) in Tokyo. It is a splendid collection which contains many diverse contemporary and historical western works ranging from biography,

philosophy and political economy to plays, poetry, novels and art and literary criticism.

To understand Akutagawa therefore is to understand the books he read and annotated and which he referred to often in his own writing. The American ironist Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914) who wrote scathingly on language, politics and religion is, for example, a name that recurs in Akutagawa's work and it is not hard to find points of common interest in their shared sceptical outlook. Akutagawa was a keen reader of Bierce and in fact owned a copy of his twelve-volume complete works. In fact Akutagawa wrote that he admired Bierce most of all the modern writers (Dykstra, 2006, p.25). Anatole France, a now little-read French novelist and journalist was not only translated into Japanese by Akutagawa but is equally frequently referred to by him in his own work as the incarnation of the modern, questioning mindset with which Akutagawa himself clearly identified. France looms large in Akutagawa's library with over twenty-five editions. He gained increased fame in Japan after winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1921 (Henry, 2009, p.220).

We may not read 'The Ball' without also reading the orientalising story 'Un bal à Yeddo' ('A Ball in Edo', 1889) by Pierre Loti (1850–1923) of which Akutagawa's story is self-consciously a reformulation. To engage with Loti is to understand the complicated power relations at work between the French and the Japanese empires at the end of the nineteenth century but also between the French and themselves as they were also presented with and called to perform narratives of civilisational supremacy. In a similar fashion, 'An Enlightenment Husband', the pendant to 'The Ball', is a story about romanticism and draws its spirit from the French iteration of the movement which Akutagawa shows held

such attraction to his Japanese contemporaries. Hugo (1802–1885), Watteau (1684–1721), Flaubert (1821–1880), Napoleon (1769–1821): these are indices in Akutagawa's work of a modern mode of cultural performativity to be explored at length in our chapter on 'The Ball'.

'The Man from the West' is another example of a work based on a foundational text from a foreign culture and is essentially about the pull of sentimentalism. Not only does it interact at length with the biblical story but it also engages with the text as a historical and therefore intrinsically fallible product. Furthermore, in typical Akutagawan fashion, the text is collided with references from modern western writers with the effect that it appears to be equalised with them and thereby loses its sacred aura. As an artistic product, it becomes enshrined in the romantic movement itself, a product of monumental sentimentalism. It teems with references to foreign writers. Goethe, Strindberg, Rousseau, Wilde, de Gourmont, Dante, Poe, Whitman, Napoleon, Shaw, France, Nietzsche, Shakespeare, Pascal, Lao-tzu and Confucius all feature in the register. Noting the overwhelming majority of western writers who are cited in this work, we are once again called to recognise that it is the western literary world which Akutagawa chooses most intimately to engage with and one which has the cosmic coherence of a gathering of artists from a variety of places and times. Rather like that famous image of the narrator looking down at the literary world from the top of the ladder in the bookshop in 'The Life of a Stupid Man', the imaginary world is dizzyingly diverse but no less imposing and coherent.

'The Man from the West' is the very performance of its title: it is written by and describes a man facing west[16].

We may not approach 'The Man from the West' without a working knowledge of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), particularly of *Thus Spoke Zarathrustra* for its conception of the eternal return and of *Beyond Good and Evil* in which the narrator deconstructs, rather like his admirer Akutagawa, the monumental metaphysical system which is predicated upon a faith in an erroneous opposition between good and evil in the human sphere. Nietzsche moves beyond this binary of conventional morality to describe rather the perspectival nature of knowledge and the perilous condition of the modern individual, ideas which clearly resonate in 'The Man from the West' as in other of Akutagawa's works.

Roy Starrs asserts that in the history of intellectual relations between Japan and the West, Nietzsche occupies a unique and important position (1991, p.17). According to Starrs, Nietzsche was the first major European philosopher whose ideas achieved a profound impact almost simultaneously in both cultures. Starrs goes on to say that for that very reason,

> his [Nietzsche's] influence in Japan, especially on Japanese creative writers, has been deeper, more widely felt and more longlasting than that of probably any other Western thinker besides Marx (1991, p.17).

[16] Seiji Lippit focuses on this image in 'Jidai' ('The Age'), set in the second floor of the bookshop Maruzen in Tokyo and "an important site in the representation of the cultural space of modern Japan and its relation to the West". (2002, p.51). From atop his ladder, the western books the narrator surveys assume the cosmic importance of the fin de siècle itself and he is quite giddy at the sight. The customers and shop assistants he perceives through the gaps seem quite shabby by comparison and bring him to the conclusion that "*Life is not worth a single line of Baudelaire*" (ARZ16:38).

Starrs sees the profound impact of Nietzsche's work on Japanese writers such as Mori Ōgai (1862–1922), Hagiwara Sakutarō (1886–1942), Akutagawa, Satō Haruo (1892–1964), Nishiwaki Junzaburō (1894–1982) and Mishima Yukio (1925–1970). He maintains that the Nietzsche vogue in Japan of the 1880s and 1890s based on ideas of aristocratic radicalism had been enabled by the programme of rapid Westernisation since the start of the Meiji era. An important part of that programme had involved the sending of Japanese students and academics to Europe to absorb whatever they could of Western culture and civilisation. By the time Nietzsche's influence began to spread across Europe, there was already a large contingent of educated Japanese in place to observe and absorb this influence, and to report back to the home country on this latest fashion in European thought (p18). Starrs goes on to report that not only was the Japanese intellectual reading public open to European ideas by the 1880s but that there had also been a shift in interest during that decade towards Bismarck's Germany as a social and political model. By the same token there was a concomitant shift away from British and French thinkers and their philosophies of positivism, utilitarianism and social Darwinism towards German Idealism as espoused by Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Schopenhauer et al (p.18). By the early 1900s, Japanese Nietzscheans were scandalising polite society with their radical individualism and so-called immoralism which was seen to threaten the ideology of national unity as promulgated by the Meiji state (p.18). It would be an irony that would not have been wasted on Akutagawa that Nietzsche was recuperated in the 1930s as a philosopher seen to be in tune with the cultural nationalism that defined the early and mid Shōwa.

Leaving aside Nietzsche and Nietzschean writers, 'The Man from the West' is also remarkable for its reference to European thinkers and writers other than novelists and poets and, as ever, the eclecticism of the juxtapositions will not surprise us. Physician and criminologist Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), the founder of the Italian School of Positivist Criminology finds himself agreeing with Goethe whose notion of the inherently daemonic is shown to have much in common with contemporary approaches to the criminal[17]. We are also confronted with Ernest Renan (1823–1892), that influential French historian of religion and leading theorist of nationalism. Renan's own *Vie de Jésus* (*The Life of Jesus*, 1863) raises anxious questions about scriptural authority and the necessarily novelistic aspects of the Bible. Acknowledging the legendary nature of much of the Bible, Renan remarks that: "there are legends and legends" (1863, p.xv)[18] thereby conceding that some legends are more credible than others. He goes on to explain that they are more credible because they are truer to a discrete ideological agenda.

When we also encounter Italian essayist and thinker Giovanni Papini (1903–1956) who wrote extensively about philosophy and religion and was a staunch nationalist who later turned to fascism, we understand that Akutagawa's reading of the Bible goes beyond a purely theological, literary or aesthetic fascination as he turns his attention to the potentially powerful political applications of romantic narrative. In this way, our study comes full circle: having begun with 'The Ball' and with the influence of romantic narrative on

[17] Akutagawa makes several references to the romantic playwright, poet and novelist Goethe. In 'The Man from the West' there is a total of thirteen references, which either pertain to his notion of the daemonic capability within us all or to the "hypocritical sentimentalism" of Goethe's age.
[18] All quotations from French are mine unless otherwise indicated.

subject formation in its cultural and nationalist identifications, we end with *Seihō no hito*, the *nec plus ultra* of romantic narrative which has the power to unite global communities across centuries.

There are references elsewhere in Akutagawa's work to other radical and iconoclastic writers, particularly those who considered the role of religion and economics in relation to national subjectivities. The Russian revolutionary anarchist and founder of collective anarchism, Mikhail Bakunin (1814–76), is cited in 'Subjective Portraits' as the influential thinker who exposed the "lies of humans and the lies of God" which ensure a mode of acquiescence in modern society. Bakunin's *God and the State* (1882 [1970]) is brutal in its criticism of the connivance, as he saw it, between the State apparatus and the Christian Church in articulating and enforcing subjugated subject positions and berates the role of the Church in inuring believers to their subordinate position through its exercise of emotional coercion. While this is a vehemently antagonistic vision of the role of religion in the modern nation state, we see how its philosophical approach has a strong bearing on the ideas articulated in *Seihō no hito*. When Akutagawa refers in 'Subjective Portraits' to modern Japanese as "prisoners who do not know they are prisoners" [ARZ11:203] as they walk up and down the Ginza[19], that modern site of consumerism and display, it is clear that he has also understood Bakunin not only through the prism of religion but also with the lens of capitalist consumption.

[19] Elise Tipton (2000, especially p.123) describes Ginza as the entertainment and commercial centre of Tokyo which emerged from the ashes of the 1923 Great Kantō earthquake. Modern department stores catered to the new office employees and salaried classes and allowed customers to browse and window-shop (*ginbura*) and thereby become a site for modern consumption and leisure.

In similar fashion, Akutagawa refers to the Russian syndicalist and anarchist Pyotr Kropotkin (1842–1921) who was a proponent of a decentralised communist society free from central government. In Akutagawa's 1923 story 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab*'* the narrator rather too passionately denies any link between the story's fictional '*Mutual Aid among Animals'*, and the first chapter of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid* (1902). Not only does this move the reader to assess the story from the economic and political standpoint of radical syndicalism and therefore against a backdrop of invidious capitalism, it also winks at the suspension and later conviction of Tokyo Imperial University Economics scholar Morito Tatsuo who had published in the department's journal an article about Kropotkin's social thought in 1920 and we are therefore reminded of the criminalisation of free discussion of those ideas understood to be pernicious to the state (Barshay 1988, p.44). The jurors who decided in 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab*'* the outcome of the crab at its trial had apparently all dreamed of the gates of heaven as those of a marvellous department store (ARZ9:283), thereby enlisting Ginza and the consumption it symbolises into a rather more malevolent network of meanings and associations.

This cursory glance at those diverse writers cited by Akutagawa in the texts we have chosen serves to illuminate once more the broadness of the writer's mental and literary landscape. Our approach throughout the study will be to consistently reinforce the diverse literary world in which Akutagawa was writing and not to shy away from now little-read writers which influenced his own work. As such we will strengthen our reading of primary sources with those primary sources read by Akutagawa. In summary these comprise a number of

French writers of whom we may note the principal guides Pierre Loti for his orientalising stories, Gustave Flaubert for what Akutagawa calls his 'bovarism'[20], Anatole France for his sceptical eye, Ernest Renan for his understanding of the nationalising commonalities within literature and history, and Remy de Gourmont (1858–1915) for his ironic blasphemy. It is easy to discern the influence that the American writer Ambrose Bierce's *The Devil's Dictionary* (1911) had on Akutagawa's writing, in particular in later axiomatic formation. Oscar Wilde is another constant companion, most clearly discernible in 'Subjective Portraits' and 'The Ball' for his lament of the 'decay of lying'.

Theoretical Situatedness

We have started to discern a group of western writers who, we will argue, forming an integral part of the Japanese intellectual landscape from the 1890s, influenced Akutagawa in formulating his own critical position. Our own theoretical stance will also be indebted to those same writers and their legacies. This is a study which aims to understand the power structures which Akutagawa was himself describing and the ways in which language and narrative play a decisive role in articulating and enforcing normative subject formations. Nietzsche would call this action "the will to truth" (1911 [2003], p.33), the process by which actors claim to universalise morality but by which they in fact

[20] 'Bovarism' can be described as those subject formations dominated by such idealised, glamorised, glorified, or otherwise unreal conceptions of oneself that they result in dramatic personal conflict or tragedy.

act tyrannically and polemically, arranging the world according to their own ideological requirements (p.44). Nietzsche sees that the means by which this is most effectively accomplished is to present the contingent as "truth" and to falsely introduce a world of symbols into things and "mingle it with them as though this symbol-world were an 'in itself', [so that] we once more behave as we have always behaved, namely mythologically" (p.51). We argue that Nietzsche's fascination for Akutagawa lay in his questioning of so-called self-evident facts and we will also draw on those critical thinkers who encourage us to engage with knowledge as a historical and ideological problem.

Althusser's notion of interpellation (1918-1990) will be central in this approach[21]. His thinking furnishes us with those critical tools which allow us to expand on Nietzsche's guiding principle, that there is no final reality and that we live in a world of signs referring to other signs (Žižek 1999, p.27). Althusser sees that hegemonic regimes function by interpellating individuals to particular social roles in a way which we see being described by Akutagawa in each of the texts we have chosen. To understand the way that ideology functions in society, Althusser has it that ideology is inscribed and reproduces itself through complex processes of recognition through those communications apparatuses such as the education system and "culture" (2001, p.104). On Althusser's view, all ideological state apparatuses contribute to the reproduction of the relations of production but crucially, the mechanisms which produce this result are covered up and concealed (p.105). According to Althusser this concealment is necessary to the ongoing success of the ideological project because not only does it allow for the exploitation of people based on a falsified representation of

[21] See in particular: *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 2001.

the world but it allows for the individual to misrecognise himself and therefore enslave himself more effectively (pp110-115). We will see this process of interpellation and misidentification in 'The Ball', 'The Peach Boy' and 'Horse Legs'.

In short, Althusser sees that in order to reproduce itself in the long term, hegemony is reliant less on such repressive state apparatuses as the police than it is on those ideological state apparatuses by which ideology is inculcated in all subjects. Through cultural practice, education, narrative and stories, dominant ideologies wholly structure the subject's sense of reality and fabricate a collective lie to which we all individually subscribe. Althusser's starting point was a Marxian world view but he goes beyond Marx to delineate those ideological state apparatuses which strengthen the state's will to power. With Althusser, Marx's observation that: "You do not know it but you do it[22]" is taken beyond the realm of capital, labour and relations of production to the understanding that reality may not reproduce itself without ideological mystification (Žižek 1999, p. 28).

Other critics have developed Althusserian thinking in other fruitful directions. Foucault for example moves from Marxian materialism towards a history of discourse and discursive practices. Put simply, Foucault is interested in understandings of power and he moves away from the analysis of actors who use power as an instrument of coercion towards the idea that power is diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and "regimes of truth". These regimes build on Althusserian state apparatuses but acknowledge that power can be embodied, performed, socialised and reinforced in often covert ways. They also

[22] All translations from the German are mine unless otherwise indicated.

expand on Althusser's point that ideological state apparatuses encourage individuals to police themselves by asserting that it is through the dissemination and normalisation of certain behavioural practices that power is maintained, thereby doing away with the need for obvious violence.

Turning towards more concrete discursive analysis, we acknowledge a deep debt to historical theorist Hayden White who sees that historical and literary narratives share strategies of explanation, emplotment and ideological implication. For White, historical narratives are not found but they are constructed even though their will to knowledge would have us believe otherwise. If history relies on narrative description for understanding, then we may choose to emplot historical events as comedy or tragedy depending on our ideological intention. This entanglement of literary and historical devices is often obscured precisely by that recourse to realism which disguises the artifice of narrative tropes from the reader. Rather than revealing the true essence of past reality, historical narrative imposes a mythic structure on the events it purports to reveal. In this way, White shows us that historical writing has been forcefully influenced by literary writing for meaning. White's debt to Althusser and to Nietzsche is clear: historical writing pretends to be objective and truthful but in the persuasiveness of its will to power, its ideological intention may be disguised or obfuscated. We will see in our study how Akutagawa came to similar conclusions as he showed how the lines between history, myth and children's tales could be blurred with the result that we are made conscious of the ideology hiding behind the seemingly innocuous.

If Hayden White has helped us understand the commonalities between literature and history that were so evident to Akutagawa, then Bakhtin has also

shaped our approach to the dialogic. In its explication of the ideological implications of genres such as the epic and the novel, *The Dialogic Imagination* helps us to understand the complex cultural discourses at stake when Akutagawa chooses not to write in the paradigmatic novelistic form while parodying the epic. For Bakhtin, the epic past signifies an absolute, sacred and inviolable past whereas the novel, being determined by experience is localised into an actual historical sequence (pp.16–19). To dialogise genres is to bring them low, to descralise and is a method typical of Akutagawan aesthetics. Bakhtin also complements White in his emphasis on the special relationship the novel enjoys with extraliterary genres. The novel is on this view a supremely historical genre in that the plot and characters are historically situated and seem to enjoy a historical unity which is contrived by the narrator who holds all in artificial equilibrium. Akutagawa's narrators are anti-novelistic insofar as they draw attention to the disunity which exists in the text. We see this in 'The Ball', 'The Peach Boy', 'Horse Legs' and 'The Man from the West'. 'The Peach Boy' will be particularly instructive in its mixing of different narrative time frames, what Bakhtin calls historical time, adventure time and epic time. This heteroglossia, the dialogic confrontation of different modes of expression and discourse is radical in its undermining of a text's claim to authority, its unmasking as hypocritical (p.311).

Bakhtin maintains that this dialogic mode of incorporated genres is radical for another reason – that it denies authorial intention. The author does not express himself in parodic, dialogised works such as Akutagawa's 'The Peach Boy' or 'The Ball', but rather he exhibits meaning as objectification. The narrator does not have recourse to direct authorial comment but rather he steps

back from it and objectifies it through the juxtaposition of different modes of expression (p.304). A highly productive device, it is the act of juxtaposition and of heteroglossia, the refracted exposition of a multiplicity of ideological belief systems which undermines an uncritical belief in the word even as it is given a pseudo-objective underpinning. Canonisation tends to elevate existing literary norms to a model which resists change whereas Bakhtin shows us that everything is part of a greater whole in which there is a constant interaction of meanings (p.426). Akutagawa's work is illustrative of this mode of undermining, he shows us at every turn that we may be deluded into thinking that there is one mode of understanding. His dialogism dereifies, stripping the word of its privilege.

Beyond abstract critical theory and particular literary criticism, there are a number of historians of Meiji and Taishō Japan who have had a profound effect on our approach to the thesis. Andrew Barshay's *State and Intellectual in Imperial Japan: The Public Man in Crisis* (1992) is one such example. Barshay makes a compelling case for the radical redefinition of political and social relations due to the creation and development of the modern state in Meiji and Taishō Japan (p.xiii). According to Barshay, the emergence of the concept of "national life" not only politicised the family but also produced the "public man" and created the new and incompatible abstractions of "official" and "dissident". Barshay argues that questions around submission to and promotion of the power of the state were exercising Japanese cultural critics like Hasegawa Nyozekan who wondered whether there could be too much obedience to the state and whether the growing purview of the state could lead to the

demoralisation of a people (p.xix). Hasegawa raised questions about the nature of the collectivity which sanctions such a differentiated morality and went on to discern the advent of fascism in such promotion of common identity and acquiescence. Barshay sees that the state under the Meiji political settlement sought to define national subjectivity through newly nationalised institutions like the education system and military conscription in order to assume a monopoly which created criminalised notions of "outsideness" (p.13). Such a radical reading of the Meiji and Taishō eras has been fundamental in our understanding of the cultural and ideological background to Akutagawa's writing. The writer's interjections in the critical discourse of the 1920s as well as subsequent appropriations of the Akutagawa narrative are illustrative of the continuing anxious dialogue about the proper role and function of national culture. I aim to demonstrate that Akutagawa's was a subtle and often radical way of engaging with wider social and political concerns at a time when the space for such engagement was being profoundly compromised by an increasingly overbearing ideological state apparatus.

Guide for Chapters to Follow

We hope here to have articulated the objectives of the thesis and also to have indicated the theoretical and discursive situatedness of the study. The study itself will proceed as follows. The first chapter aims to provide a more detailed critical introduction in order to locate Akutagawa and Akutagawa Studies within the wider Meiji and Taishō historical and cultural context. The second and third chapters make the case for Akutagawa's "rebellion" against prevailing

discourses and practices, whether cultural or literary, and their resultant aesthetics. These two chapters focus on the Taishō understanding of the Meiji past and the narratives in place to situate the one against the other. The second chapter which explores the 1920 work 'The Ball' asks the recurring and fundamentally Akutagawan question "how to know". In contesting objective knowledge and positing in its place a subjective and aesthetically delineated reality, 'The Ball' encapsulates Akutagawa's understanding of subject formation which we will recognise in subsequent texts.

In short, our focus when reading 'The Ball' will be on questions of aesthetic subjectivism and cultural solipsism which are at the heart of Akutagawa's vision and are the bases for all subsequent readings of his work. The recurrent motifs of cultural misreading and misconstruction which emerge in this story point to Akutagawa's fundamental belief in a constructed rather than an inherently objective reality, be it personal, cultural or historical. This unifying premise will recur in the fertile interstices between history and story-telling, psychology and advertising, propaganda and religion as we shall see in subsequent chapters. Common to each is the recognition that a convincing narrative requires a receptive reader with the most skilful narrative disguising the mechanics of its own conscription.

Moreover, this second chapter is crucial as it tackles the connected question of cultural relativism, central to all debates about modernity during this period. If we admit that cultural meaning is generated textually and may only be validated by a willing interlocutor then questions of culture as a will to power necessarily ensue. This theme is discretely explored in 'The Ball' and allows us to problematise the still prevalent view that holds Akutagawa as a cultural

universalist who claimed civilisational parity with the West while representing a kind of cultural aristocracy as a bulwark against mass culture.[23] While the relationship between modern Japanese literature and the West was certainly a question which interested Akutagawa and on which he wrote at length, he was less interested, I will argue, in any opposing discourses of orientalism and counter-orientalism and more interested in revealing the universally romantic pull of ideas of other cultures. 'Negi' ('Green Onions', 1919) and 'The Ball' both present young Japanese women embarking on a romantic encounter. In each story the narrator reveals the importance not of reality but of fictionality and stereotype in creating powerful cultural truths. In this way these stories demonstrate, I believe, the writer's lack of faith in the realist claim to empirical authority in order to show the fundamentally *writerly*[24] ideological complicity of all performers, whether Japanese or European, in constructing and enacting cultural myths. Our interaction with this text confirms our belief that Akutagawa's was not really a concern with fidelity to an extratextual truth but rather with the way in which narrative can persuade the reader that a romantic fabrication appears credible. In this sense Akutagawa demonstrates the forceful potential of narrative form, its fundamentally narrative will to power. These are the processes by which literary discourse claims an existential and ideological identity and meaning. Through a sophisticated metafictional narrative style, Akutagawa draws attention not only to the politics of representation but also,

[23] See for instance David Rosenfeld 2000, 'Counter-Orientalism and Textual Play in Akutagawa's "The Ball"' in Japan Forum 12:1, pp.53–63; and Seiji Lippit 2002, Topographies of Japanese Modernism, pp.39–71.

[24] Literary Theorist Roland Barthes (1915–1960) distinguished "readerly" (*lisible*) from "writerly" (*scriptible*) texts in his book S/Z (1970). Readerly texts are those which are straightforward and demand no special effort to understand whereas writerly texts demand effort on the part of the reader to "write" the meaning since the inherent meaning of the text is not immediately evident.

more subtly, to the politics of identification: which narratives do we choose to adopt, invest in and perform both for ourselves and for the actors around us?

If the second chapter asks us how we know what we think we know only to contest belief in any objective body of knowledge, then the third chapter applies such thinking to an agreed object of knowledge, that is to say the claims of imperial Japan to its recent colonies. Japanese imperial acquisitions included the annexation of the Ryukyu archipelago in 1879, Taiwan in 1895 and Korea in 1910. Japan had also expanded its sphere of influence in East Asia by seizing the previously German-held ports and operations in Shandong Province as well as the South Manchuria Railway which secured Japanese rights of settlement and extraterritoriality in Manchuria and eastern Inner Mongolia. 'The Peach Boy', the focus of our third chapter, is a playful yet disturbing work which treats Japanese militarism and notions of civilisational superiority. This work sets out what I believe to be Akutagawa's enduring concern with History, authority and mythmaking which would become more acute as the presentation of national history and norms assumed an increasingly incontestable status in the late 1910s and throughout the 1920s. 'The Peach Boy' and its pendant 'The General' both serve as mordant commentaries on Japanese militarism but whereas 'The General' was censored for references that were deemed seditious, 'The Peach Boy' was not. This brings us to the principal assertion that Akutagawa chose certain non-realist forms not only because he disputed the artistic integrity and normative value of some mimetic fiction but also because by choosing fantastic modes he could go much further in his topical criticism by underlining the methods by which the state mythologised its own history and mission.

Thematically and stylistically, chapters four and five describe the price of rebellion against prevailing discourses and practices, whether cultural or literary. Chapter four brings us to the complicity of the new urban middle classes in the modern colonial and capitalist project. New urban centres in Tokyo and Ōsaka expanded after the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 defined partly by developing railway and metropolitan lines as well as new centres of display and consumption, the department store. United by modes of mobility, daily living arrangements, leisure and consumption, a new self-identifying urban middle class is seen to emerge in the 1920s, not without its critics who saw a threat to more established modes of cultural practice. 'Horse Legs' is the bizarre tale of Hanzaburō, an ordinary, unthinking Japanese aspiring to the "cultured life" in semi-colonial China. This "cultured life" has been described by Sand as the contemporary label for the lifestyle product of cosmopolitan modernity largely made up of new and largely western ideas purveyed in mass-market books and women's magazines by the cultural intermediaries of Taishō (Sand 2000, p.101). An attractive new mode of living, the cultured life combined consumerist aspiration with notions of national and imperial progress and modernity.

When the protagonist of 'Horse Legs' fails to be the model consumer, he also fails to be the ideal Japanese subject. After Hanzaburō's sudden death, the nameless Chinese bureaucratic officials in charge of his transition realise they have made a clerical error and attempt to send him back to life. Yet, as Hanzaburō's legs have by this time almost entirely rotted away, they have no choice but to return him with horse legs which the protagonist is then obliged to try at length to disguise from his wife and employer by embracing modern living arrangements. The fantastic mode and the common Akutagawan

Verfremdung[25] device underline the absurdity of notions of modernity grounded in commodities sold to consumers in advertising and tabloid normativity. The hateful backlash of the newspaper columnist at Hanzaburō's apparently criminal opposition to modern Japanese life accentuates the coercive force of popular culture in conscripting subjects to positions of acquiescence.

Chapter five returns to the fundamental questions of epistemology, narrative and cultural iconoclasm. 'The Man from the West' is a dense work which bears as its main theme the fictional power of religion. Engaging at length with works by Nietzsche, 'The Man from the West' unpicks the Christian story as a piece of journalism which has the power to convince, unite and mobilise. As such this work is a mature articulation of the dominant tenet of Akutagawa's thinking: that stories and myths are fundamental to a community's identity but that an uncritical approach can lead to dangerous indoctrination and fanaticism. It develops that fascination with delusion and insanity explored in 'Horse Legs' in order to paraphrase a profound contemporary interest in psychological (ab)normality and deviance. It is in many ways an archetypally Akutagawan work, taking as its foundational text a canonic and unimpeachable authority and subjecting it to relentless iconoclastic scrutiny. In so doing it becomes historically and narratologically contingent, enlisted in a long line of similarly romantic pieces, its ideological supremacy deftly and completely undermined.

[25] This term is more commonly used in Brechtian parlance to describe the effect of making the familiar seem strange.

Chapter 1: Critical and Historical Context

Taishō "Culture" as an Index of modernity

> Each time I reconsider History, I can't help thinking about the *Yūshūkan*[26]. In its gloomy corridors, a variety of past forms of justice are on display. What looks like a Chinese sword is the Confucianist's idea of justice; what looks like a knight's lance is that of the Christian. Here are thick bludgeons: they are the justice of the Socialist. Over there are long swords: they are the justice of the Nationalist. As I look at these weapons, I imagine all kinds of battles and my heart naturally shudders. And yet be it luckily or unluckily, I don't recall ever wanting to take up any one of them ('Words of a Dwarf' "Buki" ("Weapons") ARZ13:38–9).
>
> Literature is not as unrelated to politics as many people suppose.[27] ('Puroretaria bungei no kahi o tou', 'On the Pros and Cons of Proletarian Literature') ARZ9:275, quoted in Keene 1984, p.576.)

This study investigates the competing yet often mutually affirming ideological imperatives governing the late Meiji (1868–1912) and Taishō (1912–26) focus on "civilisation" (bunmei) and "culture" (*bunka*) as the locus and index of modernity. "Civilisation and enlightenment" (*bunmei kaika*) was the unifying

[26] The *Yūshūkan* was established in 1882 as a Japanese military and war museum located within the Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo and is dedicated to the souls of soldiers who died fighting on behalf of the Emperor of Japan.
[27] This 1923 essay appeared in *Kaizō*: a magazine founded in 1919 to publish articles with a socialist content. Akutagawa would publish *Kappa* in *Kaizō* in 1927. The magazine was disbanded in 1944 under police pressure. For further information see James L. McClain, 2002, *Japan: a Modern History*, p.491.

precept of the Meiji state-building project and our starting point for understanding the culture in which Akutagawa was brought up. Coined by Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901), Meiji Japan's most prolific interpreter of Western values and practices, the term was explicitly associated with the progressive values of Western civilisation and the European Enlightenment. Fukuzawa's 1875 *An Outline of Theories of Civilisation* (*Bunmeiron no gairyaku*) offered a concise interpretation of what "civilisation and enlightenment" entailed. The strength and progress of the great Western nations, he argued, rested on science. Scientific advance, in turn, required a spirit of free inquiry among the general populace. By Fukuzawa's logic, liberal and progressive values were not simply moral and political ideals, they were also integral to the creation of a "rich country, strong military" (*fukoku kyōhei*) capable of assuring national independence at a time when East Asia was at threat of colonisation by western powers. In short, a civilised nation had to be an enlightened nation which valued and promoted learning and progress in all realms but particularly in the domains of education and general cultural practice.

We shall see that in time, the Meiji motif of civilisation gave way to a Taishō belief in culture as an index of modernity understood as a unifying process of performative everyday practices. Beneath the Meiji and Taishō watchwords of civilisation and culture, I will argue, lay a discursive landscape which questioned the direction, practice and purpose of modernity and nationhood. By tracing in this introduction both the historical and contemporary flux in the critical reception of the now canonical writer Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, I hope to illuminate not only what was at stake in the discourse surrounding late Meiji and Taishō cultural practice but also how we might see in Akutagawa a

subtle resistance to its hegemonic articulation. Rather like the concept of "culture" itself, Akutagawa has been used as a signifier for the tensions inherent in Japanese modernity, imagined by turns as a cosmopolitan universalist and as a narrowly Japanese aesthetic culturalist. In this introduction I aim to chart how the various discursive emplotments of the critical narrative surrounding Akutagawa are a product of the ideological landscape of the 1910s, 1920s and beyond. One such critical construction emplots the discourse as comedy in its view writer who celebrates universal human values against the threat of modern disruption. Another depicts it as tragedy: Akutagawa in an irreconcilable conflict with the world as it is.

By mapping out the writer's radical reincarnations I hope to shed light on the shifting discourse and indicate fruitful areas for new approaches which attempt to go beyond a story of personal decline towards a more radical rereading of this period. As I focus here on the historical and literary context of Akutagawa's work, I will also aim to show how current literary approaches still now have their roots in the Taishō emphasis on the biographical. Turning in chapters two to five to the works themselves, I hope that this critical scene-setting will illuminate what I see to be Akutagawa's fundamental ideas about cultural discourse which have thus far been overlooked.

Akutagawa's interjections in the critical discourse of the 1920s as well as subsequent appropriations of the Akutagawa narrative are illustrative of the continuing anxious dialogue about the proper role and function of national culture. That he chose certain generic and stylistic modes was not, I will argue, merely a matter of aesthetics and to believe that it was is merely to reinscribe the late Taishō politics of sanctifying Culture to a transcendent ahistorical realm.

Rather, I aim to demonstrate that it was a subtle and often radical way of engaging with wider social and political concerns at a time when the space for such engagement was being profoundly compromised by an increasingly overbearing ideological state apparatus.

In this critical introduction, I would like to situate Akutagawa and discursive treatments of Akutagawa within the broader social and political parameters of the 1910s to the late 1920s which have, as we shall see, delineated critical inquiry to the present day. This will require a diachronic examination of critical terms such as Civilisation, Modernity, Culture and Culturalism whose values shifted with the changing ideological terrain.

From Meiji Civilisation to Taishō Culture

> It is the task of private citizens to make a civilisation meaningful and it is the duty of the government to protect that civilisation. […] If there is a significant accomplishment, the people applaud it with joy and fear only if other nations go a step further than they have been able to proceed. Anything pertaining to civilisation is a means to enhance the independence of that nation. (Fukuzawa 1874, quoted in Lu 1997 p.350.[28])

[28] Fukuzawa Yukichi's influential 1874 *Gakumon no susume* (*Encouragement of Learning*) was based on the premise that Japan could become powerful by adopting western society's fostering of education, individualism, competition and exchange of ideas.

Born in 1892, Akutagawa was very much a child of Meiji. Much has been written about the ardent Meiji belief in Civilisation and its uneasy ideological underpinnings[29]. The sense of cultural crisis that accompanied the Meiji State's use of Western philosophical notions of Progress and Modernity would dog critics until and beyond the 1942 Symposium *Overcoming Modernity* whose delusory logic equated modernity with Western imitation and demanded the recuperation of a chimeric native homeland (Lamarre 2004, p.7).

Urgent Meiji questions about modernity and civilisation were articulated precisely as state builders tried to define a specifically national culture. Meiji statesmen like Iwakura Tomomi (1825–1882), Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835–1901) and Nitobe Inazō (1862-1933) were dedicated to Japan's international position as an enlightened colonial power and internalised Western notions equating advancement with civilisation. Their conviction that Civilisation was both a means to and an index of modernisation was steeped in Enlightenment notions of relative progress and national hierarchies. Iwakura for instance adopted contemporary European notions of the relative hierarchies of civilisations when he reported on his Western inspection tour in 1871: "Setting out from Paris, the further east one goes, the shallower civilisation gradually becomes" (quoted in Soviak 1971, p.10).[30] By this francocentric logic, Russia was the least advanced of the European nations and, when considering its position on the world stage, Japan would do well to position itself as a Hungary or as a Holland.

The Civilisationists of the early to mid Meiji have been well documented and their guiding conviction was that reforming Japanese culture would be

[29] See for instance Carol Gluck's *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the late Meiji Period,* 1985.
[30] 'On the Nature of Western Progress: The Journal of the Iwakura Embassy'. *In*: Shively (ed.), *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture*, pp.7–34.

crucial in securing Japan's position within a system which ranked world civilisations[31]. Nitobe for instance, whose *Bushidō*[32] was republished in 1905 in the elation following the victorious Russo-Japanese War as an attempt to validate a certain western view of Japanese civilisation, remained a firm believer in the (Eurocentric) doctrine of universalism. Fukuzawa, the great Meiji theorist, well-versed in the critical vocabulary of European thinkers, saw that the behaviour of the Japanese lower classes constituted a major obstacle on the path to a civilised national culture and suggested education as a means to remould commoners into modern citizens (Mertz 2003, p.60).

Indeed this Spencerian notion that there was a direct link between common native culture, the well-being of the nation and its international standing was the guiding principle of Meiji reformers and would develop into the emergence of folklore studies of the early 1900s, later to be appropriated by the state.[33] Mertz notes how the Meiji regime was keen to improve Japanese culture in the newly centralised national interest, citing for instance the fact that the popular fiction writer, Kanagaki Robun, was appointed "Observer of Public Sentiment" (*minjō shisatsuin*), toured Kanagawa and wrote articles for the *Yokohama mainichi shinbun* on education and civilisation. His 1873 *Shortcut to the Three Directives on Teaching* (*Sansokukyō no Shōkei*) presents an image

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[31] See for instance the 2009 translation of Fukuzawa Yukichi's *An Outline of a Theory of Civilisation* by D. A. Dilworth and G. Cameron Hurst.

[32] Nitobe's *Bushidō: The Soul of Japan* (*bushidō* means "the way of the samurai") was published in 1900 and was originally written in English for Western readers. The book was later translated into Japanese.

[33] Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) was an English philosopher, biologist, anthropologist, sociologist, and prominent classical liberal political theorist who developed an all-embracing conception of evolution as the progressive development of the physical world, biological organisms, the human mind, and human culture and societies.

of a community threatened from within by a lack of enlightenment whose members needed to be educated as children not to oppose benevolent political authority (Mertz 2003, p.83).

If the mentality of the common people was indicative of the state of the nation, then the formal announcement of the state education system in 1872 would be an admission that the masses could be mobilised by enlightenment (Mertz 2003, p.86). It will be a fundamental premise of this study that Akutagawa chose to write at times in the mode of popular fairy tales as a metafictional wink to the state's propagandising efforts at intellectual and affective management which intensified from the period after the Russo-Japanese War, reaching a peak in the mid 1920s. 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab*'* is one such attempt to demystify hegemonic knowledge. This apparently innocuous tale makes a subtle generic parallel between the infantilisation of the Japanese and the mythologisation of the state. It also pokes fun at the state's obsession with controlling and correcting "dangerous thought", the overbearing influence and brutality of the police, the connivance of the legal profession and the censorious popular press, the fallacy of cultural nativism and the lascivious lure of modern consumerism. Similarly, in rewriting the famous *Momotarō* tale, Akutagawa made a scathing criticism in 1924 of the Enlightenment logic absurdly underpinning Japanese colonialism while parodying the state's attempt at narrative mystification. This universally familiar story had been firmly entrenched in nationalist propaganda by the late 1880s (Antoni 1991, p.161) and was included in the newly compulsory state education system in the form of primary school reading books. In its rewriting, Akutagawa clearly squares education with indoctrination.

'Civilisation and enlightenment' (*bunmei kaika*) was in summary the slogan of the Meiji state-building project and our starting point for Akutagawa's critical stance since it formed the ideological backdrop to his formative years. The success ethic of *risshin shusse* (success in life) equated personal cultivation with national improvement. In internalising this aspiration, subjects could be said to be performing a kind of self-colonisation[34] which was part of the movement by the state as it sought to define the identity and values of its subjects and inculcate a powerful sense of mission (Barshay 1988, p.8). If there was an emerging sense of national culture then this was partly achieved through centralising institutions like universal state education, Imperial Rescripts and military conscription. Yet there was also a burgeoning state cultural apparatus which sought to create an imagined national community at an affective as well as a practical level and it is at this point that the ideological import of the intersection between civilisation and culture becomes apparent. Fanon's famous axiom holds that whereas a culture must be national, a civilisation can be supranational (quoted in Parry 1994, p.191). Such an idea neatly encapsulates the Meiji dynamic, governed by a logic which would polarise the national and the international throughout the Taishō and into the Shōwa age. In many ways Akutagawa was a child of Meiji, uninhibited by the intellectual dilemmas of his later Taishō peers: absolutely at ease with

[34] See Komori (2001) on Japan's self-colonisation: "Japan hid the fact that it faced the imminent danger of colonisation by Western powers and presented its own "civilisation and enlightenment" as a spontaneous programme undertaken as an act of free will. It concealed the self-colonisation implicit in copying the Western powers and consigned it to oblivion; in that way, the nation's colonial unconscious was formed. Later, Japan had to discover "barbarians" in its neighbourhood and take control of their territories in order to prove that it was indeed civilised." (Komori 2001, p.15)

European thought, his horizons were always much broader than those of his contemporaries and it is impossible to approach Akutagawa without an understanding of the contemporary European intellectual landscape as will become increasingly apparent as our study progresses.

If the development of a nation's *civilisation* may be gauged by the advancement in its *culture* then debates on national cultural formation were necessarily grounded in terms of Japan's standing in relation to the West. By this logic, it became imperative to develop a sense of advanced national culture in order to enter the privileged realm of international civilisation. The desire for universality was coextensive with the attempt to define a particular kind of national subjectivity (Lippit 2002, p.62). These contemporary positions were not conflicting but were in fact mutually dependent: the nascent nativist discourse for instance was still couched in the Eurocentric principle of progress. Nitobe's *Bushidō: the Soul of Japan*, written in English in 1900 is a case in point and is an illustrative attempt to carve out a specifically national character as homage to world heritage[35]. Yet while Nitobe was a confirmed internationalist, other critical observers eschewed the international and, as early as the 1870s, there were the beginnings of a nativist reaction that would progressively become more entrenched as anxiety over native cultural boundaries became more acute[36].

It is precisely this ideological pendulum swinging between a desired cosmopolitanism and its romantic pendant, cultural nativism, which galvanised

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[35] See in particular Howes 1995, Nitobe Inazō: *Japan's Bridge across the Pacific*.

[36] See for instance Kamei Koremi (1825–1885) and Fukuba Bisei (1831–1907) as discussed in Breen, 2000, 'Nativism Restored' in *Monumenta Nipponica* 55(3):429–439.

the shift from Eurocentric civilisation to Japanese culture beginning in earnest after the Russo-Japanese War and which developed into a fully-fledged aestheticisation of culture throughout the Taishō and Shōwa periods. It is also this ideational bifurcation that determined the somewhat artificial and retroactive formation of a national literary canon and Akutagawa's standing within that canon. To understand this is to understand the seemingly contradictory rhetoric by which Akutagawa can be simultaneously characterised as a cosmopolitan universalist and as the champion of a pure national literature. [37]

Language and Literary Representation: a Centralising Cultural Apparatus

The imperative to define and improve national culture was an integral part of Meiji jockeying for position in the race to the top table of world civilisation. Subsequent debates about culture were inherently about national boundaries, especially when they were perceived to be threatened by westernisation, massification and an expanding empire. Nanette Twine has written authoritatively on the modernisation and standardisation of language and literature as part of the movement to enter the civilisational League of Nations

[37] This opposition, between a seemingly apolitical focus on culture and its obverse, political engagement, will be explored at length in this study. According to Hayter, Culturalism (*bunkashugi*) was the "organising centre of the discursive terrain of Taishō" (2008, p.20). Pincus (1996, p.34) describes the philosophical underpinnings of the vogueish term *kyōyōshugi* as deriving from the German *Bildung* to refer to a Taishō philosophical movement which broadened into a general cultural *Zeitgeist* extolling the virtues of self-cultivation, particularly in what concerned aesthetic, ethical and spiritual accomplishments. The emphasis on spirit or *Geist* denotes the creation of a tradition of inwardness which would be appropriated in the Shōwa era by the nationalist far right.

while establishing the internal authority of the state[38]. The *genbun ichi* movement (the unification of the spoken and written language) was integral to the modernisation process at both an instrumental and a sentimental level (Twine 1991, p.10). A prerequisite for national unity, the development of a national language was also a means to reevaluate Japanese heritage by ridding the language of the deep-rooted influence of China, now seen as an exhausted, backward civilisation (p.115). Not only was it hoped that the language would be desinicised but the importance of Chinese culture would be eradicated by the devaluation of *kanbun* (Chinese letters[39]) and the Confucian classics. This attempt to construct an imagined national community based around a modern sense of unified national language would be constantly problematised by Akutagawa who was as well-read in the Chinese classics as he was in European literature and who peppered his work with Chinese as well as European references as he drew attention to the fallacy of a pure cultural community.[40]

The various fortunes of the nationalist linguistic *genbun ichi* movement mirrored wider debates about defining a national culture. The movement was accompanied by the institutionalisation and regulation of literature through various committees and associations promoting particularly "civilised" art forms

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[38] Nanette Twine 1991, *Language and the Modern State: the Reform of Written Japanese.*

[39] *Kanbun* had a long intellectual and institutional history in Japan. It was the general writing style for official and intellectual works for many centuries and was central to education. See in particular M. Mehl 2003, *Private Academies of Chinese Learning in Meiji Japan: The Decline and Transformation of the* Kangaku Juku.

[40] One need only read Akutagawa's 1920 piece 'Aidokusho no inshō' ('Impressions on my Favourite Books') to see that the classic sixteenth-century Chinese tale *Hsi Yu Chi* (*Journey to the West*) by Wu Cheng'en was one of Akutagawa's boyhood favourites.

and censoring undesirable ones. The seminal work *Shōsetsu Shinzui* (*The Essence of the Novel*, 1885) by writer and Waseda Universtiy Professor Tsubouichi Shōyō (1859–1935) argued that the novel was the most highly regarded literary form in all civilised societies and that therefore if Japan wished to also present itself as a civilised nation, it should embrace the novel. Formerly associated in Japan with frivolity, sensational pornography or artificial didacticism, the new realist novel would indicate a civilisation which had equalised with the European greats (Twine 1991, p.134).

Not only was a normative literary culture developing under Meiji under government guidance, but it was also one which would be increasingly regulated by formal and informal censorship. This would also be a recurring motif in Akutagawa's work which had to find increasingly subtle ways of expression. This could take the bold form of including the censor's *fuseji* (crosses or circles used by the censor to blank out sensitive words) in order to draw attention to the act of excision as it did in the 1922 work 'The General' or in more elliptical references as in 'Subjective Portraits' to such writers as Heine who had fled to England upon the publication of his work *Ideen: Das Buch Le Grand* (1827), for uproar provoked by the following satire:

> The German Censors _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
> _____ _____ _____ _____ idiots _____ _____ _____
> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
> _____ _____ _____ _____ (Quoted in Sammons 1979, pp.127–9.)

Heine, like Akutagawa, had written at a time of increasing state-directed cultural nationalism which had seen the literary field depoliticised to embody a romantic transcendent notion of *Kultur* so the nod to him may well have been a political gesture.

Yet for all the focus there has been on the importance of *genbun ichi* in the state-sponsored drive to eradicate a plurality of discourses, it is possible to see a more richly variegated linguistic landscape as critics like Karatani, Golley and others have observed[41]. The fact that the *genbun ichi kai* was disbanded in 1910 may be an acknowledgement that the monologic impulse had not been entirely successful (Twine 1991, p.171). Akutagawa's scepticism of *genbun ichi* is formally and belatedly enunciated in the 1927 work 'Bungeiteki na amari bungeiteki na' ('Literary, all too Literary') in which he responds to Satō Haruo's affirmation of the superiority of colloquial language which had become the paradigmatic form of Taishō literary discourse:

> Of course, it's not that I don't have the desire to "write as one speaks." Yet at the same time there is another side of me that wants to "speak as one writes." As far as I know Natsume Sōseki was truly an author who spoke as he wrote. […] As I said before, there are authors who write as they speak. But when will an author who speaks as he writes appear on this solitary Far Eastern island? (ARZ15:147 quoted in Lippit 1999, p.40.)

Lippit sees a complication of the *genbun ichi* notion of the smooth transfer of meaning between author and reader in Akutagawa's conscious

[41] See in particular Karatani Kōjin, 1993: *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature* and G. L. Golley 2000: *Voices in the Machine: Technology and Japanese Literary Modernism.*

mixing of linguistic styles. Such a *mélange* may be exemplified, for instance, in the adapted language of *Heike Monogatari* (*The Tale of Heike*[42]) and Aesop's *Fables* in 'The Death of a Martyr' (1918) and 'Kirishitohoro shōninden' ('The Legend of St Christopher', 1919); or again in Akutagawa's use of the archaic style of early Meiji translations of European literature in the 1919 story 'Kaika no satsujin' ('An Enlightenment Murder') (Lippit 1999, p.40). It is, I will argue, this diachronic revelation of the ideology at play in language and style that directs Akutagawa's deliberate use of parody and transliteration in 'The Ball' as we shall see in chapter two. As Golley stresses, Akutagawa is conscious of language as a historical product rather than as a given, and he calls attention to its status as fabrication. In this sense, Yokomitsu's bellicose declaration of a "war of rebellion against the national language" (quoted in Golley 2000, p.54) in 1924 had already been waged by Akutagawa some years previously.

That the state sought to define the identity of its subjects not only by overhauling the language but by addressing its mode of artistic expression and its national literary canon has been superbly demonstrated by Suzuki, Ueda and others[43]. Following Fukuzawa Yukichi, Tsubouchi Shōyō and others, reformers looked to the nineteenth-century European classification of literature as a guide to advancing a native canon (Shirane 2000, p.7). Two important concepts prevalent in western theories of literature were internalised by Japanese critics: firstly that literature expresses an unchanging national character and secondly

[42] The *Heike Monogatari* was a twelfth-century epic account of the struggle between the Taira and Minamoto clans for control of Japan.
[43] See in particular Suzuki Tomi 1996, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*; Shirane Haru and Suzuki Tomi (eds) 2000, *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity and Japanese Literature*; Ueda Atsuko 2005, *The Production of Literature and the Effaced Realm of the Political*; and M. C. Brownstein 1987, *From Kokugaku to Kokubungaku: Canon-Formation in the Meiji Period*.

that literature progresses as society evolves so that a nation's literary history charts changes in its level of civilisation (Lee 2000, pp.190–1).

The European privileging of drama, poetry and, in particular, the novel, was the single most important consideration in reforming the generic conception of Japanese literature which had previously held poetry in high esteem but not drama or prose fiction (Shirane 2000, p.7). In *Shōsetsu shinzui* (*The Essence of the Novel* 1885–6), Tsubouchi Shōyō a novelist and literature scholar who had lived in England and became the most important translator of Shakespeare in Japan, noted the immaturity of Japanese forms and promoted an urgent reformation of the theatre and an encouragement of the novel as the most advanced form of literature (Lee 2000, p.187). To this end Iwakura called for the revalorisation of *nō* as he had admired opera in Europe and recognised immediately its cultural cachet (Lee 2000, p.184). What we now know as traditional classical musical drama *nō* was at that time renamed *nōgaku* (*nō* opera) reflecting the need to match Europe's operatic traditions (Shirane 2000, p.8). Similarly the resurrection of the dramatist Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725) in the so-called Chikamatsu boom of the 1890s was sparked by Tsubouchi's quest for a quintessential national playwright as part of the theatre reform movement at Waseda University: evidence, according to Bialock, of the fact that "multifarious works of various historical provenances had been made to speak in the monologic voice of the nation" (Bialock 2000, p.178).

Ueda (2004, p.198) notes that Meiji debates surrounding the institution of modern literature and its relation to national identity politics designated the western novel as telos, with the realist novel as the very apex of modernity. The Meiji promotion of the novel was to recommend Japanese civilisation as modern.

As in linguistic reform, desinicisation was imperative. Suzuki (1996, p.45) argues that the *genbun-ichi* movement was closely related to the institutional promotion of a national language after the Sino-Japanese War (1895), galvanised by the generally-held view that Chinese civilisation was in decline. Both Houses in the Diet agreed to the establishment of a committee to investigate the state of the Japanese language and in 1901 the organisation sponsored a series of public lectures on *genbun ichi* (Twine 1978, pp.354). As a result of such motions, The Ministry of Education commissioned a committee in 1902 to examine ways and means of making *genbun ichi* the standardised national style and shortly afterwards reading books in schools began to use the new style (Twine 1978, pp.354–355).

Rubin has written at length on the Meiji government's urge to control literary production and its success in increasing its purview, particularly after the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 and the subsequent rise in liberal, social and political movements.[44] A top-down policy towards acceptable language and literary forms can be seen for example in revised laws, informal pressure, extralegal bannings and an abortive literary academy. This Committee on Literature (*Bungei iinkai*), established in 1911 by Education Minister Komatsubara Eitarō was regarded with suspicion by contemporaries like Ōgai who saw it as a pernicious effort to control literature through an academy (Rubin 1984, pp.202–203).

The privileging of the realist novel was a top-down policy by a state wishing to demonstrate cultural parity with the West. However the canonisation of certain native forebears continued retroactively throughout the 1920s,

[44] See Rubin, 1984, *Injurious to Public Morals: Writers and the Meiji State.*

particularly in the *watakushi-shōsetstron* (I-novel debate) of the mid-1920s which sought to naturalise a tradition of I-novels in the disputation between the Modernists and the Marxists. Indeed, what had begun, under Meiji as the reformulation of the Edo *gesaku*[45] principle of *kanzen chōaku* (promote virtue, chastise vice) in the realist mode turned, in the 1920s, via a European romantic privileging of the individual, into an indigenous literary genealogy of essentialised culture (Hijiya-Kirschnereit 1996, pp.15 and 131). The anxious attempt in the 1920s to delineate a quintessential national culture in the face of generic and ideological assault from the Modernists and the Marxists reinvigorated a movement that had in fact begun in the early Meiji. This movement was determined by the awkward logic of modernity and retrenchment. The privileged signifier of modernity, "the self" (*watakushi*) became, from the 1910s, part of the paradigm shift towards a solipsistic interiority of experience that was the representational expression of the ideology of depoliticised *Kultur*. Pincus describes at length how the Taishō philosophy of *kyōyōshugi* ('cultivation', from the German *Bildung*) had its ideological roots in German neo-idealism which claimed at once a nationalist faith in the distinctiveness of cultures and the universal ideals of enlightenment (1995, p.37).

The Taishō nativist bent which saw art as the ethnographic expression of a nation's culture while extolling the virtues of self-cultivation was famously seen in Kume Masao's embrace of the *Ich-Roman* (the I-novel) in 1925 (Suzuki 1996, p.15). This was the foundation for his promotion of the Japanese form,

[45] See Fowler, 1988, on the *gesaku* genre: literally "playful composition", the form was part of the "vulgar" non-literary fiction that burlesqued life and included such strains as humorous, amatory and didactic reading books (p.23).

the *watakushi shōsetsu* (the I-novel) for which he attempted retroactively to construct a native genealogy thereby establishing the *watakushi shōsetsu* as the literary norm. Akutagawa's refusal to indulge the *watakushi shōsetsu* ideology has surely been the greatest impediment to his standing as an important writer, not least because the literary canon is still now populated by great I-novelists. Indeed the critic Terada Tōru attested to the novel's continued omnipresence and Akutagawa's ultimate concession to it when he wrote in 1950: "Akutagawa belittled the form only to use it in time" (quoted in Fowler 1988, p. xvii). However, as we turn our attentions in our final chapter to Akutagawa's last work, 'The Man from the West', while also glancing at *Kappa* (1927) and 'Cogwheels' we will note that the narrative style and underlying ideological conceit which characterise the *watakushi shōsetsu* are undeniably missing. It is of the upmost importance to note that Akutagawa chose not to write novels and that as such he did not embrace the ideological underpinnings of its form.

To conclude, the early- to mid-Meiji state policy of attempting to dictate culture from above was part of the formation of a centralising state ideology which shaped the Emperor as benevolent patriarch educating his subjects as children in their newly nationalised role. The 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education directly linked the pursuance of learning and the cultivation of the arts with the advancement of public good as it exhorted civilised behaviour and filial obedience to the state. It was hoped that the realist I-novel would act as an improving tool by dint of its credible civilised protagonists embodying the national ethos of success (Suzuki 1996, p.20 and Mertz 2003, p.196).

We shall see that the state's desire to legislate a national culture required much more subtle means than the early Meiji thinkers envisaged and the literary landscape remained much more complex than has traditionally been acknowledged. However, the dominant contemporary literary history which charts a movement from confidence in the novel as the archetypal national form to a profound questioning of it by the Modernists of the late 1920s remains intact. Lippit's penetrating *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* (2002) for instance locates a radical interrogation of cultural production with the Modernists Yokomitsu Riichi, Kawabata Yasunari and Hayashi Fumiko. The main thrust of Lippit's treatment of Akutagawa which serves as a preface to the Modernists proper, concerns his apparent late embrace of the confessional form in his declining years as a capitulation to the literary status quo. Lippit argues that if the I-novel served as the defining genre of a national community then the writer's later frenetic and despairing appropriation of it merely highlighted the dissolution of a certain type of national subjectivity to be more successfully expressed by the radical stylistic experimentation of the Modernists (p.33). On this view, Akutagawa's personal decline and what he describes as the writer's late disintegration of form is indicative of a wider crisis surrounding the institution of literature. Yet what this appraisal ignores, I believe, is the fact that Japanese Modernism itself, rather than being the radical movement Yokomitsu *et al* designed it to be, would actually be complicit in essentialising a Japanese aesthetic that Akutagawa knew to be a fabrication. For that reason, I have chosen to structure my study so that the last work analysed, 'The Man from the West', rather like 'Kappa', both written in 1927, are not examples of a so-called

confessional literature but continue the writer's life-long problematisation of form as national community.

Akutagawa's choice of form is, I will argue, as important as the style or content of his stories. His choice of the short story at a time when the novel was *de rigueur* was ridiculed by some of his contemporaries who saw that he lacked the physical stamina to create more virile (read national) novels. For instance, Tanizaki Junichirō in the famous "plotless novel debate" of 1927 wrote:

> If I may be so bold as to be personal, the difference between Mr Shiga and Mr Akutagawa although both write short fiction, has to do with the presence or absence of signs of physical stamina in their works. Powerful breathing, muscular arms, robust loins – such attributes are found even in short stories if they are superior pieces. In the case of full-length novels, it is the anaemic ones that run out of breath in the middle, while the great novel has the beauty of an unfolding of event upon event, the magnificence of a mountain range rolling on and on. (Quoted in Karatani 1993, p.161)

It will be my contention that Akutagawa's choice not to write in what was the paradigmatic normative form, the novel, draws attention to the ideological foundation beneath the *genbun ichi* project and the valorisation of the realist novel. Indeed, this line of enquiry follows critics such as Karatani who sees a genealogy of generic critique with implications for the hegemonic solidification of the modern novel and wider questions about authority and national narrative in, for example, Sōseki's 1905 *Wagahai wa neko de aru (I am a Cat*) (1993, p.176). This parodic work, whose feline first-person narrator narrates his own death, is a wink to the confessional mode of writing which favoured authenticity

above all else. Mori Ōgai picked up the critical baton in 1909 in his hilariously dull parody of a scandalous Naturalist novel *Vita Sexualis* when the narrator describes the protagonist's disapproval of non-mimetic literature:

> In due course of time, Sōseki Natsume began writing his novels. Mr Kanai read them with great interest. And he felt stimulated by them. But then in rivalry to Sōseki's *I am a Cat*, something came out called *I too am a Cat*. A book appeared entitled *I am a Dog*. Mr Kanai was quite disgusted on seeing these stories and ended up by not writing anything himself. (Ōgai 2001 (1909), p.25)

In Akutagawa's refusal to operate within the mimetic mode we see a reiteration of the writer's vehement critique of the reduction of fiction to the principle of confession. In his tenacious use of the fantastic, we follow Todorov in the view that he blurred the distinction between fiction and reality in order to make the fabrication of "reality" seem more fantastic (1973, pp.10 and 167, quoted in Waugh 1984, p.109).

The Mobilisation of Narrative: Historiography and Canon Formation

Bakhtin has it that novelistic discourse always develops at cultural and linguistic boundaries.[46] On this view, it is not surprising that debates about the novel would be so critical in the reforming early Meiji, again in the period of retrenchment following the Russo-Japanese War and yet again in the mid 1920s when the impact of Marxism, massification, consumerism and an expanding Japanese Empire called for a redefinition of native cultural boundaries. Part of this anxiety to define national culture was, as has been superbly delineated by Tanaka, Suzuki and others, the attempt to narrativise a national historiography in which the formation of a literary canon was central[47]. Suzuki cites as an example the sudden revival and elevation in the 1880s of the long-forgotten Saikaku (1642–93) who was held as a native forebear of the realist novelist (1996, p.27). The nativist reaction occurred in fits and starts alongside the necessity of positioning Japan as part of the advanced nations or again in opposition to the internal threat of massification. Early Meiji attempts at canon formation followed the Enlightenment logic of progress which not only pitted nations against one another in a hierarchy of civilisation, but also required nations to demonstrate internal progress. Taishō efforts, by contrast, would battle with notions of relative civilisation and went some way to dehistoricise Culture into a transcendent ethnic essence.

Wallerstein's contention (1991, p.78) that "pastness" is a modern political phenomenon is apposite here. The discursive construction of the past and its

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[46] See in particular Bakhtin 1981, 'Discourse in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp.259–422.

[47] See Stefan Tanaka 1995, *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History*, and Suzuki Tomi 1996, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*.

presentation as incontestable is an essential part of the creation of an imagined community as has been brilliantly described by Mikhail Bakhtin, Hayden White, and Benedict Anderson[48]. Pastness is a mode by which people are persuaded to act in the present. It is fundamental to the maintenance of group solidarity and is used to establish or challenge social legitimacy (Wallerstein 1991, p.78). As White elaborates, the past is narrativised, emplotted and presented as the fulfilment of a project creating the illusion of progress and national identity (1987, p.42). The Meiji historiographical project, amplified under Taishō, was to legitimate the status quo as the culmination of a national destiny, devise a heritage which would allow contemporaries to demonstrate progress and confirm a national spiritual filiation. Thus history, language and literature were mobilised, following the Enlightenment model of progress over time, giving value to mediaeval and Tokugawan texts that had previously been little valued (Shinada 2000, p.14). It was in fact under Meiji that the study of History and Literature was institutionalised and given a new scholarly status. The 1890 *Nihon bungakushi* (*History of Japanese Literature*) made clear its didactic aim:

> Through literary history […] we trace the progress of wisdom and virtue since ancient times and learn that there were highs and lows in man's ideas, feelings and imagination, depending on the age. […] In this way, morality becomes clear, government and education advance, enabling all people to turn eventually in the direction of true happiness, which is the great purpose of living in this world. We say that all writing, from history, fiction, and poetry, to that concerned with

[48] Mikhail Bakhtin 1981, *The Dialogic Imagination*; Hayden White 1987, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*; Benedict Anderson 1983, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*.

> government, religion, and other matters, is essential to man only because it is a means to achieve this great purpose. (1:5–6 quoted in Brownstein 1987, p.452)

In 1891, in the wake of the Imperial Rescript on Education which had set out the national ethic of fidelity to the Emperor and love for the nation based on the Confucian ethics of filial piety, the first literary anthologies were published which, it was hoped, would serve as didactic manuals for subjects (Shirane 2000, p.237). Such histories closely followed Taine's *History of English Literature* and saw literary texts as the expression of the social, political and cultural environment, the product and reflection of a national collective community and were as such crucial in consolidating ideas of nationhood. Based on European generic models, these anthologies were highly Confucian in orientation and guided by the new notion of a national language (Shirane 2000, p.237).

One of the most influential texts of the mid Meiji was Tsubouchi's 1885 *Shōsetsu shinzui* (*The Essence of the Novel*) which can be seen as an attempt to move the Japanese tradition into the mainstream of world civilisation while still preserving the cultural autonomy of the nation. Chiming with the Meiji doxa of civilisation and enlightenment *(bunmei kaika*) the work sets out a manifesto for art as the ennobling of life through beauty and moral purpose. The novel was considered to be a superior literary form because it deals with substance over appearance. The purpose of the novel should be a real critique of human life rather than the mere arousal of emotion. It should offer a credible and relevant portrait of human beings as they truly are in an understanding of cause and effect. Tsubouchi praises *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*) for precisely

this verisimilitude, thereby emphasising the native lineage of realism from the Heian time and arguing that the Japanese tradition could be compared favourably to European realism. Indeed the preface begins with the exclamation (quoted in Keene 1956, p.55): “What a glorious tradition the novel can boast in Japan!” In short, the novel should be either didactic or artistic but in either case it should be mimetic. Capable of dignifying the spirit, of giving moral instruction, of supplementing authentic history and of being at the forefront of modernising all literary forms in its elegant vernacular style, the novel was linked to the betterment of the nation.

If, as noted earlier, the momentum behind the Meiji and Taishō periods was the ideological push and pull of euro-centric universalism and its dynamic other, nativism, then the increasingly nativist bent of the middle-Meiji literary canon formation is not difficult to comprehend. What is intriguing however is that the civilisational logic, so dear to the Meiji reformers, continued to be employed even by the most apparently insular of cultural commentators who looked to define a national culture while downplaying international imperatives.

Shively (1971, p.78) describes the “japanisation” of the middle Meiji as the nativist reaction to modernisation as seen for instance in the resurrection of Confucian classics and the revival of interest in traditional arts and literature. Shirane (2000, pp.35 and 41) sees the elevation of the revered eighth-century anthology of poetry, the *Manyōshū*, in the 1880s as part of this movement towards a national literature accepted as equal to the civilised world. Prized for its depiction of emperors and commoners, it asserted a national community and naturalised the nation-state (Shirane 2000, p.41). According to Brower (1971, p.388), it went beyond Enlightenment logic when it was lauded for its apparently

supreme expression of the pure Japanese spirit. This turn towards inventing and celebrating native culture coincides with the elation following the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 and can be demonstrated by the profoundly ideological disciplinisation of native knowledge in the rise to prominence of *minzokugaku*, folkloric studies as described by Harootunian (1990, p.99). Perhaps a realisation that in the long-term a top-down cultural model would be problematic, the idea of the folk as seat of an essential culture was a radical revision of civilisational theories because it signified a move away from the unifying idea of historical progress towards an ahistorical claim to national essence. An importation of the German concept of the Volk, this epistemological development would have huge political implications. It went hand in glove with the development of the *kokutai* (national polity) ideology of the 1930s, by which the Emperor, sacred and inviolable, became the spiritual patriarch whom the family nation, bound in turn by spiritual and biological filiation was compelled to obey.

If the modern nation state can mobilise as its cultural foundation the concept of the common people, then its purchase will be all the more secure[49]. The notion of the folk as the seat of an absolute national culture was a very modern imperative. It did two seemingly contradictory things. It harnessed the Enlightenment idea of national project as progress as it eschewed the Enlightenment belief in transformation. In so doing it made an important historiographical and generic about-turn: it turned from History to Epic[50].

[49] For a convincing treatment of this idea see in particular Etienne Balibar 1991, 'The Nation Form: History and Ideology' in Balibar and Wallerstein (eds) *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, pp.86–105.

[50] Our understanding of the term "epic" stems from Bakhtin (1981) who sees it as the genre best suited to creating a national past given its insuperable

Harootunian has shown how the new folkloric studies of the 1900s contested the epistemology that saw History as progress and turned rather to the seemingly urgent task of cultural preservation and totalisation (1990, p.99). Yanagita's new nativist narrative, which had initially been part of the Meiji project of self-colonisation, effectively dehistoricised cultural origins which were, from this point onwards, mythical rather than historical.

This emerging ethnic nationalism had its narrative voice in the epic and was one that Akutagawa was quick to recognise. The presentation of history as epic was to proscribe alternative interpretations and the linking of the folk with national spirit would turn any criticism into *lèse-majesté*. Bowring sees that Ōgai's later interest in history was fraught with vexation for precisely this reason: his recognition of the need to distinguish between myth and history would invite government meddling (1979, p.192)[51]. Akutagawa's continual identification of national myths as fabrication, his problematising of the historical record and his parody of the genre of fairy tales, the closest representational form to mythical common knowledge, reveals the sinister infantilisation of the Japanese by the state.

On the eve of the Taishō era, within the newly ideological notion of culture there lay a paradox which engendered a normative teleology: the Meiji civilisation discourse had heralded a particularist universalism in a bid to cultural parity with the West by which Japan had established its own national origins

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distance from contemporary reality. The epic allows for an absolute, monochronic past which may not be experienced but only revealed and therefore has to be consumed with reverence (pp.13–16).

[51] See the section 'Useful and Inspiring Fictions: Legend or History?' in our chapter on 'The Peach Boy' for more detail about the state's attempts to control knowledge.

demonstrating progress. Yet this cultural model contained a tenuous and potentially incompatible discursive alliance between the modern (the historical), and the essential (the epic). The logic at the heart of this discourse would engender an artificial bifurcation between tradition and transformation. The global, understood as modern, heterogenous and ultimately inauthentic necessitated the counter-emergence of the local, the traditional, essential and pristine (Berry, Mackintosh and Liscutin 2009, p.9).

As we shall see, Taishō culture would at best be a precarious balance between cosmopolitanism, complete with all its inherent cultural politics, and at worst a proto-fascist reified and aestheticised culture. Akutagawa's standing was dependent upon that balance for both celebration and denigration.

The Changing Political Landscape of the 1910s

The gradual mythologisation of the state and national culture mirrored the more authoritarian bent of the 1910s. Barshay has shown how the successful modernisation of Japan and the broadening of public discourse which ensued forced the state into a position of retrenchment as it endeavoured to control the ideological terrain (1988, p.7). The influx of western ideas through major translation projects was the logical continuation of the Fukuzawan promotion of civilisation, but when it was feared that notions like individualism, popularised for example in the Nietzsche vogue of the 1890s, might conflict with statist claims to authority then they were increasingly viewed as a threat and precipitated a politics of cultural autonomy (Silverberg 2006, p.19).

From the 1890s there was a movement from openness to western ideas towards their identification with dangerous individualism as in such threats to the imperial orthodoxy as the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement (Barshay 1988, p.7). The state saw the creeping "isms" of the early 1900s – Individualism, Naturalism, Liberalism, Socialism, – as a potential threat to its hegemony and sought to reinforce the state's authority by reinvigorating the sense of mission which had waned with the passing of the urgent imperative of war (Rubin 1984, p.61).

The sense that culture could no longer be dictated from above was central in the new focus on issues of private values as a means to inculcate a normative social behaviour (Mertz 2003, p.93). The *genbun ichi* movement had proved successful in so far as the colloquial style had been consolidated as the dominant language of literary expression, mainly, according to Lippit, due to the newly popular Naturalism movement (2002, p.11). This new colloquial style could be used to express inner thoughts and emotions which could be sensational. Katai's popular *Futon* (*The Quilt*, 1907) for example, describes in painful detail the attraction of a middle-aged writer to a young female student.

The reaction to Naturalism is an illustration of how artistic representation was intimately linked with wider ideological questions. The most private of behaviours, sex, became an index of a wider social debate: that of a nefarious Western individualism versus a wholesome Confucian morality (Rubin 1984, p.110). If the ideology of the *kazoku kokka* (the family state) had been formalised by the 1890s then it is not difficult to understand how the patriarchal model of organic harmony would be threatened by the notion of the individual

(Silverberg 2006, p.145). Sexual licence and promiscuity, especially pertaining to women, were easy metaphors for the threat to the polity as a whole.

The reaction to the rise and popularity of Naturalism 1906–12 is indicative therefore of a wider ideological concern which seemed to shift from public to private morality. It was a question intrinsically about social norms. The public outcry surrounding the 1908 Debakame Incident galvanised public debate about the link between private morality and Naturalist fiction. This was the case of the bucktoothed (*debakame*) gardener Ikeda Kametarō who raped and suffocated to death a young married woman after spying on her through a knothole in the public bath. The newspaper reports attributed Ikeda's sexual crime to his penchant for Naturalist fiction, thereby encrypting sexual debauchery as part of the new dangerous armoury of Western ideas which threatened Meiji Confucian family norms (Rubin 1984, pp.1–3). Underlying the fear of Naturalism was a fear of a breakdown in public morality and the creeping use of censorship is a testament to how the state would increasingly intervene in non-normative fiction. 1909 saw the height of the popularity of Naturalism and was also the worst year yet for the suppression of literature. There were in total forty-three "moral bans" including works by Kafū Nagai (1879–1959) and Tokuda Shūsei (1872–1943) and translations of Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893) and Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) (Rubin 1984, p.115). As an ironic commentary on the increasingly authoritarian stance of the late Meiji, Ōgai's *Vita Sexualis*, in which the narrator makes a comical reference to "debakame-ism" but no reference to any actual sex, was banned by the authorities in 1909 (Rubin 1984, pp.130–135).

Ōgai saw the focus on sexual morality as dangerous because it was a foil for regulating public morality in general. Indeed, if there was a rash of "individualistic" works banned for their dangerous influence on private morality then this was certainly part of a wider movement which linked private conduct with public morality. The same logic governed the Home Ministry's campaign against Socialism as equally menacing to the coherence of the nation. This reached a peak in 1911 when the socialist Kōtoku Shūsui (1871–1911) who had translated works of anarchists such as Kropotkin was executed, along with eleven others, for High Treason (Bowring 1979, p.185). This infamous case led to a call for a ban on the importation of European literature as morally corrupting and the encroachment by the state on intellectual freedom which branded non-national intellectual and artistic expression as anti-national. We shall see how Akutagawa parodied this intellectual fanaticism in his hilarious and tragic tale 'Horse Legs' in which the zealous Editor-in-Chief of the *Shuntian Times* vilifies the protagonist Oshino whose sudden equine insanity and desertion of his wife amounts to a crime against the nation: "Like an unblemished golden jar, our glorious National Essence stands upon a foundation of belief in the family" (ARZ12:98).

How tantalising it is then that Akutagawa's 1916 thesis took as its subject the work of socialist and activist William Morris. It is lamentable that the thesis burned in the fires of 1923 since we must look elsewhere for Akutagawa's position on contemporary socialism[52]. Ōgai vocally asserted the need for

[52] Fujii looks to Eguchi Kan's 1966 recollection of the university student Akutagawa reading Marx in English translation as proof that he had been interested in Marxist politics but that he declined his invitation to speak at the Fabian Society in 1924 was illustrative of a more ambivalent stance (2010, p.10).

intellectual freedom in 1909 and attempted to spell out the differences among such controversial concepts as Socialism, Anarchism, Naturalism and Individualism, fearing that the state would clamp down on freedom of expression:

> If we cannot make a thing public because it is considered dangerous we will be unable to translate any works that express modern ideas including those of Tolstoy, Ibsen, Maeterlinck and Hofmannsthal. You would have to reject the whole of modern literature and enforce a kind of literary seclusion policy. (Quoted in Rubin 1984, p.133.)

The events of the early 1900s shifted the state's mission towards intellectual management. If public discourse was to be hegemonised by the state then it would have to control the affective sphere by domesticating the growing middle classes (Garon 1997, p.20). According to Garon, the chief managerial tool used by the state to inculcate social norms was the protracted moral suasion campaign which began in the 1910s and was an attempt to mobilise the middle classes into self-policing. *Kyōka*, or moral suasion, was a direct translation of the Chinese word *jiaohua* which reveals its Confucian etymology (p.4). Garon traces this line of intellectual coercion which relied on the alliance between the state and progressive middle-class groups to maintain social harmony. By developing an intellectual and emotional appeal of the statist ideology, it would be possible, it was hoped, to reproduce the will of the state in its subjects. Such a process of hegemony encapsulates the Gramscian notion that a power structure will only secure itself in the long term if it appears

to be consensual (Eagleton 1990, p.104). By interpellating individuals as subjects and appealing to normative daily practices and cultural apparatuses, the state would resolve the question of how to continually produce the people or rather how to have the people produce itself: in other words, how to nationalise the individual.

One of Foucault's fundamental tenets on the nexus between ideology and culture was that the most effective way to discipline members of modern societies was to normalise thinking and behaviour [53]. Such Althusserian ideological apparatuses which worked to that end could be overt such as the moral suasion campaigns and mechanisms of censorship, or more subtle like the mobilisation of culture as we shall see directly. Garon sees an ideological genealogy in the cultural apparatuses right through to the 1930s citing the Local Improvement Campaign of 1906–18, the Bōshin Imperial Rescript of 1908, the Campaign to Foster National Strength of 1919, the Imperial Rescript regarding the Promotion of National Spirit of 1923, the National Federation of Moral Suasion Groups of 1924, the Campaign to Encourage Diligence and Thrift of 1924–6 and the Moral Suasion Mobilisation Campaign of 1929–30 as chronological examples (1997, p.10).

While Fukuzawa had feared the "undue preponderance of authority" (*kenryoku no henchō*) in the 1890s, (Barshay 1988, p.8), the escalation of censorship, the establishment in 1910 of the government-sponsored Committee on Literature (*Bungei iinkai*) which sought to guide literature in its proper course and the renewed indoctrination in schools and community organisations after the Kōtoku case were sure signs of a state intensifying its attempts at

[53] Michel Foucault 1991, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

ideological control (Nolte 1987, p.76). Indeed, the implication of the trial for intellectual freedom would not be missed by Kafū who wrote after renouncing Naturalism:

> …of all the public incidents I had witnessed or heard of, none had filled me with such loathing. I could not, as a man of letters, remain silent in this matter of principle. Had not the novelist Zola, pleading the truth in the Dreyfus case, had to leave his country? But I, along with the other writers of my land, said nothing." (Quoted in Seidensticker 1965, p.46)

The 1910s witnessed a stark redefinition of heterodoxy and "dangerous thought" and a new impetus was given to the Right Wing. Heterodoxy came to include thinking which questioned the sanctity of the state and could be perceived to lead to corruption of public morality (Garon 1997, p.81). Marxism, which questioned the national success ethic and was dangerously international in scope, would be a particularly threatening manifestation. Surveillance was strengthened in 1919 to watch for "dangerous thought" and the Special Higher Police was established in the 1920s to destroy Communist and religious groups.

The repressive potential of the emerging bureaucratic structure after 1900 which was preoccupied with controlling dangerous thought emerged in the Taishō focus on culture as an ideological means to regulate behaviour. We turn our attentions presently to the intensified regulation of literary practice and the reification of culture as the state moved to instil a new national subjectivity which would increasingly be removed from politics, itself a highly political action. In this way we shall see the politics at play behind Harootunian's paradigm shift

from Meiji Civilisation to Taishō Culture which would be acutely questioned by Akutagawa[54].

Taishō Culture: the Middle Classes and Normativity

> July – My greatest enemy is Tsuneko. I finally managed to convince her that we should be living a "modern, cultured" life, so we turned our only Japanese matted room into a wood-floored Western room. That way, I can get by without taking my shoes off in front of her. (ARZ12:91, translated by Rubin 2006, p.136)

Culture was a watchword of the Taishō age and yet was a sign with many meanings, hotly debated by contemporaries. As we have indicated, one important aspect of culture was borne of Meiji civilisation, namely the attempt to define and disseminate a new normative national subjectivity. Akutagawa's wickedly pointed critique of modern life, 'Horse Legs' collides the fantastic with the mundane and is a satire of the progressiveness of modern life as well as the reduction of fiction to the principle of confession. The Taishō belief in culture as an index of modernity, a unifying process of performative everyday practices is unpicked in this story. The "modern, cultured" life that typical Japanese commercial graduate Hanzaburō "nobody special" and his ordinary wife Tsuneko lead in Beijing is indicative of the type of lifestyle ardently desired by

[54] H. D. Harootunian 1974, 'Introduction: A Sense of Ending and the Problem of Taishō'. *In*: B. S. Silberman and H. D. Harootunian (eds), *Japan in Crisis: Essays on Taishō Democracy,* pp.3–28.

the middle classes of the 1920s. Defined by material culture and convinced of their modernity (read progressiveness) we can see in the consumer culture of the middle classes an aspect of the ideological apparatus which expressed itself more insidiously in everyday practices[55]. Garon notes the importance of the middle-class desire to attain certain lifestyles and their shared belief in modernisation in shaping and policing the public (Garon 1997, p.20). In 'Horse Legs' we witness Garon's puzzling alliance between the state and the progressive middle-class groups in the modernising yet ultimately conservative agenda of improving daily life, saving, rationalising and maintaining social harmony. In this sense we see a close link between the state and cultural production: state ideology presumed and produced a consumer subject (Silverberg 2006, p.22).

Kashiwagi has shown how daily life in the 1920s was transformed by "modern" consumer goods, part of the drive for Taylorist state-driven attempts at reforming lifestyles (2000, pp.62–63). The Cultured Life Research Group (*Bunka seikatsu kenkyūkai*), for instance, was founded in 1920. The aim of this society was to improve living conditions to match new "cultural" (read modern) lives in the new era. The founder of this society also founded the Society for Cultural Diffusion (*Bunka fukyūkai*) for the same purpose in 1922. These groups and other similar associations are examples of the middle classes assuming the

[55] By "consumer culture", we refer to the cultural imagination expressed in practices of the middle classes in centres like Tokyo and Osaka. Typically paid for through monthly salary or wages earned outside the home, many services and goods were branded and sold in new sites, most notably department stores. They were promoted through advertising in the new media of daily newspapers and monthly magazines. For more on 1920s' consumer culture, see M. Silverberg (2006), *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times*.

task of directing, disseminating and sustaining state-sanctioned normative behaviour. Direction from the state was indeed forthcoming as in, for example, the Lifestyle Improvement Exhibition (*Seikatsu kaizen ten*) of 1919 and in the establishment of the Alliance for Lifestyle Improvement (*Seikatsu kaizen dōmeikai*) in 1920. The Alliance looked to reform most areas of daily life, including housing and social interaction (p.63).

Akutagawa's indictment of "the cultured life" was radical not least for his aesthetic judgement of mass culture which has been amply demonstrated in the critical opposition between "pure" and "mass" literature in which Akutagawa was resurrected, from the 1930s, as an aesthete who could be harnessed to the culturalist cause. Yet, I will argue, it was also radical in its understanding of the mobilisation of the middle classes in the dissemination of a certain normative state ideology. Akutagawa was disdainful of the social-managerial force of public opinion and the glorification of consumerism. He was highly critical of art and the performative actions which constitute "culture" that were conformist, affirmative, accommodating and which infantilised their subject. In his constant attention to the constructedness of form, he is, I believe, setting out art as oppositional. Indeed it is in Akutagawa's manipulation of form that the ideological import of his ideas can best be gauged. If consumer culture was the 1920s performance of certain state-directed behaviours, then the development of literary form was critical in solidifying an acquiescent imagined community and came to be mobilised in the quest for an incontestable mythical national narrative.

Realism as an Affirmative Mode

> If the subjects he depicted had been somewhat more lofty and elegant, he would have occupied a higher place in literature, but it is a regrettable limitation that he turned his gaze only in the direction of harsh realities, especially the vulgar matters of the pleasure quarters. (On the writer Saikaku Iharu (1642–93) in *Nihon bungakushi* (*History of Japanese Literature*) 1890, 2:461–62, quoted in Brownstein 1987, p.456.)

> …neither as spectacular as the suicide of Mishima Yukio in 1970 nor as quiet as the death of Kawabata Yasunari in 1972 […] the death of Akutagawa appeared to many in Japan to mark the end of an era, foreshadowing the militarism and disasters to come. (Hibbett 1970, p.19)

The first quotation, from the 1890 *Bungakushi* (*History of Japanese Literature)* sets out the kind of moral biographism which has characterised literary criticism from the Meiji civilisation project to recent times. The second quotation illustrates how Akutagawa's low standing in the literary canon has been determined by the circumstances of his death. Hibbett dwells, like many others, on the writer's suicide as a metaphor for a defeated artistic project. Even Rubin sees that some of the psychological strain that led to the writer's suicide derived from his undoubted misgivings about his art (1984, p.71). In both quotations we see the continuation of a line of thinking that had its roots in the Meiji principle of *kanzen chōaku* (promote virtue, chastise vice): that a writer should lead by example and, in writing about experience, should civilise his reader. It was in this way that literature could be harnessed to the ideological project which

sought to interpellate the subject, a founding theory with which Akutagawa profoundly disagreed. It is an irony that the narrator's axiom in 'Horse Legs' that: "society rarely offers critical comment regarding the way a person dies" (ARZ12:84) would be so monumentally disregarded by Akutagawa's critics after his death.

Hijiya-Kirschnereit has demonstrated how a novelist's biography was central to his credibility as a writer and how his claim to truthfulness had a long cultural tradition (1996, pp.13 and 63). The moral investment in the life of an author stemmed from the Meiji urge to find exemplars of modern life and directed in turn a mode of literary criticism which sought to find instructive links between art and life. Under the reforming Meiji, the novelist appropriated the edifying role and moral legitimacy which had previously been assumed by writers of histories (Fowler 1988, p.192). Hijiya-Kirschnereit has shown how this Meiji vogue for the author-sage has dictated the trend of literary research, the remnants of which are still discernible today in the concern for referentiality. She notes that *shishōsetsu* research has been slow to venture beyond the limits of *shishōsetsu* theory itself which sees the author's life and work as an indivisible unity (1996, pp.81 and 98). Such a moralistic mode would engender the cult of the author hero of whom Shiga Naoya was the supreme example (Fowler 1988, p.192). The rise of the *bundan* (literary circles) was crucial in legitimising critical focus on the writer's life as much as on his writings (Fowler 1988, p.128) and writers with any aspiration to seriousness learned to present themselves as "ideals of their type" (Fowler 1988, p.192). Shiga was vocal in his claims to ethical exemplarity, writing for instance:

> Fiction is a means and not an end. […] I want to write about everyday life and by doing so improve it. I shall develop into a better person, and my creative writing shall be a by-product of that development. (SNZ9:528, quoted in Fowler 1988, p.192)

This view which sees novelistic writing as an adjunct of moral endeavour turns the writer into the unifying element of a text whose goal is to teach the reader how to live (Fowler 1988, p.193). Hijiya-Kirschnereit's assertion that Meiji *shishōsetsu* theory would shape the subsequent direction of literary criticism can be seen for instance in the critical acclaim afforded Shiga by such commentators as Yamamuro Shizuka who, in 1944, saw in the writer "a healthy and vigorously moral voice" (quoted in Fowler 1988, p.193).

Akutagawa's personal demise and his refusal to write realist texts are surely the main reasons for which he has been shunned by commentators until recent critics have chosen to see in him a precursor of the Modernists. This biographical approach can be summarised in the observation by critic Tsuruta Kinya who attributed Akutagawa's rejection of the *shishōsetsu* form to an aversion resulting from his own biographical failings (quoted in Hijiya-Kirschnereit 1996, p.103). In a similar vein, the writing of Kasai Zenzō would be discredited for its apparent lack of moral appeal: Kikuchi Kan's curt assessment in 1925 was that no one would care to read the work of an inveterate drunkard (quoted in Nakagawa Graham 2007, p.100). Kasai retorted to this universally hostile critical reception in an essay entitled 'Grumbling, Palaver, Sarcasm' (*Guchi to kuda to iyami*):

> What is left after you remove the grumbling and the palaver and the sarcasm from my fiction? Why nothing! […] If people insist on calling my writing of these last fifteen years drunken palaver, I can't very well protest. Because that's exactly what it is. (KZZ3:201, 203, quoted in Fowler 1988, pp.281–83)

The importance of the writer's biography in cementing his standing as a serious writer went hand in hand with the text's claim to truthfulness, and the centrality of experience as the source of knowledge (Hijiya-Kirschnereit 1996, p.60). Responses to Katai's *Futon* (1907) were representative of the approach which sought to catalogue the correspondences between literature and private life (Fowler 1988, p.122). Indeed Fowler sees in reactions to *Futon* the beginning of a critical method which evaluated a text by how faithfully it depicted an author's life and which conflated the author with the narrator (p.123). This biographical literalism continues to govern criticism and can be seen for instance in treatments of Akutagawa's 'The Ball' as we shall investigate in our second chapter.

This exaltation of the author-hero which sees the text as a direct expression of the author's moral voice is epitomised, as Fowler illustrates, by the phrase "bun wa hito nari" (writing is the person) (p.193). This convention of the author as an actor who played himself and presented himself without mediation meant of course that the distinction between autobiography and fiction lost its significance and was the literary complement to the *genbun itchi* belief in the transparency of language (Fowler 1988, p.xxvi). According to Maruyama, Japanese writing denies mediation because of its traditional epistemology: in oral literature and in *monogatari*, the storyteller seems to

merge with the characters to create the impression of authentic, lived experience (Fowler 1988, p.73). As the highest value attached to writing was authenticity combined with moral vigour the *monogatari* would be valorised as experiential knowledge (Fowler 1988, p.29).

Yet by this rationale it might be easy to confuse what Barthes has called *l'effet de réel* and *l'effet du réel,* which is the impression of reality created by the realist method and the effect of reality on a text[56]. The ideological exigency of this blurring of fact and fiction, the expression of which would be the realist mode, would not be lost on Akutagawa who tried at every turn to reveal the constructed nature of historical and literary facts, especially when mobilised for the presentation of a national identity as an incontestable historical reality. As we investigate this central premise, we are indebted to such critics as Hayden White who urge us to unpick the rhetorical devices common to narrative, whether fictional or historical which create a claim to authority (1987, p.19). White's assertion that narrativity is inherently novelising builds on the work of the Structuralists and post-Stucturalists who demonstrated that narrative was not only an instrument of ideology but that it was "the very paradigm of ideologising discourse in general" (p.33).

The realist text and the historiographical method which employed myth as its narrative form appear to oppose one another but in fact stem from the same ideological motivation to stake a claim to representational authority. This performative production of meaning and its ideological applications is consistently highlighted by Akutagawa whose writing reveals the discursiveness of "reality", its ability to be manipulated and encoded to various ends as such

[56] Roland Barthes 1968, 'L'effet de réel', *Communications* 11, pp.84–9.

diverse works as 'The Ball', 'In a Bamboo Grove', and 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab*'* clearly demonstrate. White's guiding principle that "the plot of a historical narrative is always an embarrassment and has to be presented as 'found' rather than put there by narrative techniques" (1987, p.21) would be consistently problematised by Akutagawa as he sought to reveal the ideological imperatives at stake in the normative discourse of the novel and the mythologising tendency of contemporary historical writing. His recourse to the genre of the fairy tale may not be the culturalist withdrawal from reality some critics have maintained but rather a poignant remark on the mythologising thrust of state policy.

The Committee on Literature (*Bungei iinkai*) was part of the post-Kōtoku attempt to recapture, shape and enforce the national essence through the state-sanctioned institution of literature but met with frustrated suspicion on the part of writers, many of whom refused to be appointed to it (Rubin 1984, p.198). Sōseki for instance published his reservations in the *Asahi Shinbun* in 1911, warning:

> …it is not difficult to imagine that the government, having established the members of the academy as if they were the final judges of literature, will, by means of this institution, and employing the most distasteful methods, encourage only those works amenable to their administrative purposes and suppress all others under this ostensibly laudable – but vague – banner of encouraging the development of wholesome literature. Surely there will be many cases where the "wholesome literature" of an unbiased critic does not coincide with what the government calls wholesome, and then he will find the establishment of a literary academy most distressing. (Quoted in Rubin 1984, pp.202–203)

Critic Higuchi Ryūkyō (1875–1929) nodded to the potentially sinister mystifying application of such a committee dominated by people agreeable to the government when he referred to the reputation of Iwaya Sazanami as a writer of children's stories: "Moralism + Fairy Tales = Committee on Literature" ('Kōjushugi no renchū', *Nihon oyobi Nihonjin* 'The Gang for Censorship', *Japan and the Japanese*, June 1st, 1911, p.135, quoted in Rubin 1984, p.207). Akutagawa's appropriation of the moralising genre of the fairy tale is a subtle subversion of the infantilising and normative imperative at play in all fiction, realist or historical.

Eagleton has it that aesthetics are supposed to signify a kind of functionlessness (1990, p.3). Yet aesthetic concepts play, however tacitly, a central part in the constitution of a dominant ideology and the realist mode is no less embroiled in such an enterprise. We have seen how the valorisation of the realist text stemmed from its perceived authenticity whose didactic imperative lay precisely in the kind of subjectivity that readers should assume by moving them to identify with a worthy protagonist. In this way it produced a domesticating effect and delineated proper and improper discourse and was as such the very paradigm of the ideological – by encoding emotive attitudes relevant to the reproduction of social power and providing the middle classes with the ideological model of subjectivity it requires (Eagleton 1990, p.75). Not only does the realist novel provide a normative social model but its mimetic representational devices disguise its fictionality and therein lies its true ideological force. It promotes a unity between citizens as it mystifies and legitimates dominative social relations making them appear natural, universal and incontestable (Eagleton 1990, p.96). If realism can be defined as the

concealment of the mechanics of representation (Fowler 1988, p.xxiv) then the form can be seen as the specifically ideological content of the text as a whole and to see the form as given is an exercise in ideological mystification (White 1987, p.204).

The logical continuation of a Confucian mode of didacticism, the mimesis of the 1910s was a supremely normalising mode strengthened by the growing newspaper readership which formed an imagined community. The focus on a kind of *Bildungsroman* which encouraged identification between the protagonist and the reader, linked by realistic routes of social advancement is a sure example of the role of literature in normalising desirable subject behaviour. The development of the 1920s *shōsetsu ronsō* (debate on the novel) went further to create a literary canon to which writers were incorporated in proportion with their imitation of canonical values which explains why Akutagawa would be excluded until his reinvention in the late 1920s and 1930s as a national aesthetic writer.

It is noteworthy that major periods of critical debate on the *shishōsetsu* tended to centre on national identity: the mid 1920s definition of the "pure" *shishōsetsu* simply inscribed the I-novel into a "pure" Japanese tradition as modernism threatened to challenge a cohesive national identity (Golley 2000, p.54). Akutagawa would be posthumously enlisted into this creation of a tradition of pure literature even though he had been criticised by the *bundan* in the mid 1920s for his forays into non-pure literature (Fowler 1988, p.50). Indeed he was adamant that literature should not concern itself with referential truth, an approach he saw as artistically debasing (Hijiya-Kirschnereit 1996, p.149) and which he expanded in his *Watakushi shōsetsuron shōken* ('My View on the I-

Novel') in 1925. The *shishōsetsu*'s apparently faithful representation of life, he argued, does not by itself make it superior as art but stems from a moral imperative (Fowler 1988, p.50). In this short argument Akutagawa clarified his view that the contemporary valorisation of *shishōsetsu* writing had an intrinsically ideological function which he was quick to separate from its artistic merit. The simplification of writing to its mimetic function was one Akutagawa was keen to overturn and is evident throughout his work. Indeed in the same piece on the *watakushi shōsetsu* he unequivocally rejected his friend Kume Masao's claim that "the true way for prosaic art is the I-novel", belittling the notion that "a writer cannot express anything unless it already exists inside his mind" (ARZ13:21).

Akutagawa had never been an advocate of the Naturalist form [57] although in the 1920 piece 'Impressions on my Favourite Books' he expressed his admiration for Tokutomi Roka's 1900 work *Shizen to Jinsei* (*Nature and Life*) (ARZ6:299). This essay is important for it is here, if proof were needed, that we learn that it was precisely the playful, anti-Realist works to which Akutagawa had always been drawn and that he admits growing tired of Japanese Naturalist novels at an early age. Works as diverse as *Journey to the West*[58] with its roots in Chinese mythology, the early science fiction adventure stories of Oshikawa Shunrō (1876–1914)[59] as well as Sōseki's satirical *I am a Cat* were the kind of

[57] See for instance Edward Fowler's *The Rhetoric of Confession*, 1988.
[58] *Journey to the West* is a Chinese novel published in the sixteenth century during the Ming dynasty and attributed to Wu Cheng'en.
[59] In 1900 Oshikawa published *Kaitō Bōken Kidan: Kaitei Gunkan* (Undersea Warship: A Fantastic Tale of Island Adventure), the story of an armoured, submarine in a future history of war between Japan and Russia, foreshadowing the Russo-Japanese War of 1904.

stories which appealed to the young Akutagawa who went on to admire Wilde, Goethe and the experimental Strindberg.

Indeed, responding in 1925 to Kume Masao's article *Watakushi shōsetsu to shinkyō shōsetsu* (*The I-Novel and the Mental-state Novel*) which held that the confessional form was surely the highest form of literature, Akutagawa insisted on the irrelevance of "truth" to literary art. In this essay entitled *Watakushi shōsetsuron shōken* (*Some Views on the I-Novel Discourse*) he wrote that:

> The problem of truth, of something not being a lie, has no authority with relation to the problem of literature. 'Being honest' or 'not deceiving' is a moral law, not a literary law. (quoted in Abee-Taulli 1997, pp.7–8)

This last sentence is important for it brings to the fore the moral potential inherent in all narrative: although it does not matter that literature is not "honest", it does matter that it stakes a claim to a moral truth.

Ambivalence towards Proletarian Writing

Akutagawa would apply the same critical logic to proletarian writing which, in his view, was disingenuous in that it was firstly the product of bourgeois culture and secondly, had the transparent aim of "making art while making propaganda" (*Puroretaria bungakuron* (On Proletarian Literature) ARZ12:31). His ambivalent response to Proletarian Literature has, I believe, been mispresented by critics

keen to show Akutagawa as a politically conservative bourgeois writer who did not embrace the movement. It is true that he did not promote Proletarian Literature in this essay but this, I would argue, was for two distinct reasons. Firstly, he saw that the proletarian distinction was a misnomer, borne in fact of a bourgeois culture which is systemically inescapable in a modern capitalist society: "because the world is an extremely complex place, loosely speaking there is not much difference between capitalists and the proletariat" (p.29). Secondly as a literary movement he saw that it put politics before art and was merely a disingenuous bourgeois propagandist syphon for a simple political idea.

Akutagawa realised that he had become a target of proletarian writers' scorn for the bourgeois intellectual class. In *Puroretaria bungaku ron* (*On Proletarian Literature*) he began by asserting: "I do not mean to speak evil here of proletarian literature. I want to defend it. […] However, as I am generally considered to be a bourgeois writer, probably they will tell me: 'We don't need you to defend us.'" (p.29) He rebuffed proletarian criticism as simplistic, arguing that it was absurd to automatically nominate anyone who was not explicitly proletarian as bourgeois. He went on to expose the irony that the writers of proletarian literature themselves rarely emerged from the ranks of the working class: "As, in our present society, there exists no proletarian culture, […] proletarian literature should be considered just another form of literature borne of bourgeois culture" (p.29). He cited, as an example, the work of socialist writer Bernard Shaw, whose 'bourgeois' lifestyle belied his political message (pp.29–30). Yet his biggest criticism of contemporary proletarian literature remained its

lack of artistic value. “After all is said and done,” he concluded, “proletarian literature too should be of good quality” (p.31).

The famous so-called Plotless Novel debate of 1927 between Tanizaki Junichirō and Akutagawa has been resurrected by some critics in a bid to see Akutagawa as a solipsistic, art-for-art’s-sake writer. He certainly prized the artistic merit of a work of art over its claim to referential truth, viewing the bad habit of autobiographical writing as shameless (Hijiya-Kirschnereit 1996, p.149). That is not to say he thought that literature should not be concerned with wider political questions. In the 1923 work ‘On the Pros and Cons of Proletarian Literature’, Akutagawa opens as follows:

> Literature is not as unrelated to politics as many people suppose. It might more properly be said that the special characteristic of literature is that it can be related even to politics. Proletarian literature, which has finally got underway only recently, has been much too slow in making its appearance. (ARZ9:275, quoted in Keene 1984, p.576)

Akutagawa was not in fact as against proletarian literature as many critics have maintained. What he abhorred however was the prostitution of good writing to a facile cause, insisting that not all bourgeois people were bad, just as not all proletarians were good. Fanatical proletarian writing was just as prejudiced as fanatical imperialist writing and Akutagawa remained sceptical of political appropriation of narrative form which did not recognise its own ideological positioning. What Akutagawa claimed he valued most of all was, “the freedom of the mind” (ARZ9:275–76).

It was of course precisely this focus on artistic integrity and freedom of mind which, as Akutagawa himself foresaw, helped to brand him as a bourgeois aesthete. Marxist writers would excoriate his perceived lack of social responsibility, exemplified perhaps by Miyamoto Kenji's 1929 *Literature of Defeat*[60] which portrayed his suicide as the inevitable culmination of his aberrant writings – the antithesis of the national genre that was the *watakushi shōsetsu* (N. Lippit 1980, p.60). Yet it was also this focus on artistic integrity which secured his later rescue from Marxist abjection as the tide turned fearfully and decisively away from proletarian writing towards a depoliticised, aestheticised literary mode whose normative function expanded an imagined reading community into an essentialised, mythologised national community. It is in the mid to late 1920s that Akutagawa's recourse to myth would reveal the mode's more sinister ideologising power.

From Realism to "Pure" Literature: Culture to Culturalism

While the 1910s and early 1920s saw certain centralising factors such as the *bundan* and the Committee on Literature seeking to direct and normalise the proper function of literature, the late 1920s were more problematic. The international proletarian movement and the advent of mass culture seemed to threaten an agreed articulation of a normative national identity. It was precisely

[60] Akutagawa's totemic suicide, envisioned as the metafictional swansong of the Taishō era enabled the reconstruction of his work as a literature of defeat immortalised in Miyamoto Kenji's now infamous essay of the same name: *Haiboku no bungaku* (*The Literature of Defeat*), in Akutagawa Ryūnosuke *kenkyū shiryō shūsei*, ed. Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi, vol.6, 1993, pp.222–46.

because the discursive domain was diverse that there was a need for greater prescription. Increasingly forceful intervention by the state in the daily lives of subjects in such developments as the thought police is indicative both of the acute realisation of the need to direct behaviour and of the practical difficulty in so doing. The move in the late 1920s to depoliticise culture and to reify it as a site of incontestable national community would better illustrate the coercive congruence between the state and the nation (Rosaldo 1994, p.250).

Such a dynamic was not lost on cultural commentators who fiercely debated the function of culture as social practice even as its discursive parameters were being questioned. Barshay relates for instance the conscientious writings of journalist Hasegawa Nyozekan (1875–1969) who tried to understand the forces at work behind the (self-) mobilisation of the people by an expanding state (1988, p.xviii). As he recognised its growing purview he questioned whether it was either natural or desirable to submit to and promote the power of the state or whether, on the contrary, there might be too much obedience (p.xix). Particularly after the 1910s, the audience for public questions was expanding beyond the urban middle classes, facilitated by the success of the education system and the growing publication industry. Barshay dates the irruption of the concept of society into Japanese parlance to 1917–8 and the supposed inspiration of the Russian Revolution in engendering the Rice Riots (p.21). When the dispatch of troops to Siberia by Japan and the western powers in 1918–22 in the hope of putting an end to the Bolshevik regime and quickening patriotic sentiment backfired, reporting on the Rice Riots was banned and journalists including Hasegawa Nyozekan resigned (p.153). Tokyo Imperial University Economics scholar Morito Tatsuo was suspended and later convicted

for publishing in the department's journal an article about the Russian anarchist Kropotkin's social thought in 1920 thereby making it clear that the free discussion of ideas was being criminalised (p.44). Akutagawa made a sideways glance at the case in his 1923 story 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab', in which the narrator vehemently denies any link between the story's fictional "Mutual Aid among Animals," and the first chapter of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*.

The state's perception that the real danger lay in systems of thought and organisations that questioned the sanctity of private property or imperial rule led to an attempt to hegemonise public discourse and mark out any disagreement as secular heresy (Barshay 1988, p.15) as the first article of the Peace Preservation Law of 1925 makes clear:

> Anyone who organises a group for the purpose of changing the national polity or of denying the private property system, or anyone who knowingly participates in said group, shall be sentenced to penal servitude or imprisonment not exceeding ten years. An offence not actually carried out shall also be subject to punishment (quoted in Lu 1996, p.397).

'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab' pokes fun at this authoritarian turn of events in an obvious wink to police repression of anti-national ideas by offering an alternative ending to the traditional folk tale in which the crab and his accomplices are all arrested by the authorities and secured under lock and key. After repeated trials, the chief offender, the crab, received the death penalty. The convoluted juridical prosecution illustrates just how easy it was to obfuscate the "natural" justice of the case with the connivance of public opinion which was hijacked by the tabloid press and economic experts who detected a leftist plot.

On this view, it is not only the despotic state which can be blamed for the absurdly cruel treatment of the crab but rather the abetting of the entire social system which underwrites it:

> Readers familiar with only the folk tale may at this point be shedding sympathetic tears over the sad fate of the crab. The death of the crab was only just, however. Only the sentimentalism of mothers and children would feel it to be unfortunate. The public considered the sentence of the crab appropriate. On the very night the sentence was carried out upon the crab, the judge, the public prosecutor, the attorney for the defence, the jailer, the prison chaplain and the executioner were all reported to have slept soundly for a full forty-eight hours, and not only did they sleep well but they dreamed of the gates of heaven. According to interviews, heaven itself appeared singularly like a department store built along the lines of a feudal castle (ARZ9:283, translated by T. E. Swan, 1969, pp.507–510.)

The Peace Preservation Law of 1925 was the culmination of a series of measures including the establishment of the Special Higher Police, the *Tokkō,* in 1911 following the High Treason Incident of 1910. This repressive law was specifically aimed at tackling socialism and any attempt to alter the *kokutai*. Ironically it coincided with the enactment of universal male suffrage in 1925 which guaranteed the growth of legal proletarian parties even as the Peace Preservation Law sought to ensure that none of their programmes ever materialised (Barshay 1988, p.187). In 1927 a Thought Section was introduced along with more elaborate censorship mechanisms, harassment, arrest and torture of those espousing heterodox views. Any expression of opinions even

remotely endorsing socialism prompted ministers to pressurise the administration into sentencing the offender (p.43).

Barshay asks how artists and critics were able to express disquiet from within the system and wonders whether we might discern examples of E. M. Forster's "slighter gestures of dissent" before we believe wholesale the intellectual conversion of the so-called *tenkō* of the 1930s (p.24). Increasingly, under the dominance of the developing *kokutai* conception of heresy as enforced by the Peace Preservation Law there would be no legitimate means to criticise the existing power structure without appearing to question Japaneseness itself (Bialock 2000, p.171). We shall see as we turn our attentions to the late 1920s the reinvention of culture as an essentialised ethnic mythology. Akutagawa, along with other critics, looked to lay bare the ideological roots of state mythology and culturalism as one of the "slighter gestures of dissent".

Nolte sees cultural criticism (*bungei hihyō*) as the definitive genre of the Taishō era, arising from the broadening discursive terrain, the desire of intellectuals for a new critical spirit and the struggle to transform society. It was Takayama Chogyū who apparently coined the term *bungei hihyō* as a translation of *Kulturkritik* in an article for *Taiyō* in 1901 (p.20). Yet this desire for a genre of Japanese cultural criticism was apparently borne of frustration as Takayama saw that there was a distinct paucity of critics ready or able to voice, analyse and oppose the spirit of their time and he lamented the dearth of commentators comparable to the likes of Nietzsche, Whitman, Tolstoy, Zola and Ibsen (Nolte 1987, p.20). It is worth noting that these are the very writers and critics who

recur in Akutagawa's work and indicate the writer's consistent engagement with the critical trends of his time.

By the late 1910s we begin to see a semantic shift from *bunmei* (civilisation) to *bunka* (culture) which is illustrative of a broader ideological shift away from civilisation and towards Culturalism that would be cemented in the 1920s. *Bunmei* had characterised the optimistic Meiji belief in national culture as part of international civilisation and had required an increasingly prescriptive definition of a national culture. Taishō imperatives to define culture were necessarily ideological and it was precisely because the primacy of the national was being questioned in such movements as Marxism and global consumerism that later Taishō definitions reinforced the ethnic to the point of essentialisation. As Marxism had demanded the politicisation of literature and had pitted bourgeois, aesthetic art against engaged, proletarian art, the inevitable clamp-down on politicised art as invidious to the state would result in a renewed demarcation of the proper realm of art as outwith politics.

The term "culturalism" (*bunkashugi*) was apparently first used in 1919 in a lecture by the economist and philosopher Sōda Kiichirō entitled *The Logic of Culturalism* (*Bunkashugi no ronri*).[61] The ideological implications inherent in the German term *Kultur* of which *bunka* was a direct translation are clear and yet so is the genealogy from the Meiji notion of civilisation. Culture should transcend politics and, in joining a universal aristocracy of the spirit: Stendhal's "happy

[61] Pincus (1996, p.34) describes the philosophical underpinnings of the vogueish term *kyōyōshugi* as deriving from the German *Bildung* to refer to a Taishō philosophical movement which broadened into a general cultural *Zeitgeist* extolling the virtues of self-cultivation, particularly in what concerned aesthetic, ethical and spiritual accomplishments. The emphasis on spirit or *Geist* denotes the creation of a tradition of inwardness which would be appropriated in the Shōwa era by the nationalist far right.

few", separate pure, high culture from a debased, mass culture[62]. In this way "culture" could divorce itself not only from a dangerously political Marxist movement but also define itself against a globally depreciated mass market.

It was of course this notion of culture as the index of an elite global cosmopolitanism that has most obviously been applied to the "culturalist" Akutagawa in his clear scorn of mass culture and in his own alliance with the international canon which included Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Strindberg and Ibsen among other European greats. Akutagawa's seemingly glib remark in the 1927 work 'The Life of a Stupid Man' that "*Life is not worth a single line of Baudelaire*" (ARZ16: 38) encapsulates for many critics the writer's so-called philosophy of sublimation and his seemingly complete alterity from the historical world. However, the fact that Akutagawa italicises the quotation in order to maintain the conceit of reported speech shows that Akutagawa was winking perhaps not ironically at this Wildean vision of the artist. Furthermore, by refusing to have a story published in the same issue of *Chūōkōron* as low-brow writer Muramatsu Shofū (Fowler 1988, p.137) Akutagawa revealed a consciousness of his own literary standing.

If Akutagawa was a supreme cosmopolitan who was as at ease with the European classics as he was with the Japanese then this was because he retained a sense of artistic value which transcended national boundaries. We will be quick to contest any criticism of a study founded largely on European writing since this was the world Akutagawa actively inhabited and a wilful disregard of its intellectual and artistic importance would not only conjure an illusory national boundary which would prevent a meaningful understanding of

[62] Stendhal dedicated his 1836 novel *Lucien Leuwen* "to the happy few".

Akutagawa's cultural landscape but also give more credence to the impasse of (counter-) orientalism than it merits.

Yet that Akutagawa has also been mobilised by more narrowly-defined national cultural critics should not surprise us. Such debates were not merely confined to questions of national cultural provenance but were naturally caught up in wider entanglements of a political and ideological nature. Abjected as Akutagawa was by the Marxists during his lifetime who preferred to see in him a self-indulgent aesthete, it is logical that to "overcome" the Marxists would be to recuperate the aesthetic and sanctify it. Critic Okuno Takeo paraphrased the contradiction when he saw in Akutagawa's work: "an enclosed yet cosmopolitan cultural zone in which the question of cultural boundaries was not a significant concern" (quoted in Lippit 1997, p.128). The Plotless Novel Debate of 1927 has largely been reduced to Akutagawa's regard for artistic integrity and poetic spirit as if these concepts necessarily excluded wider social concerns. Yet it will be my assertion that Akutagawa's concern for poetic spirit did not preclude a broader critical cultural concern. Similarly, his esteem for European writers is, I will argue, a more subtle means of criticising an increasingly nationalistic cultural agenda rather than evidence of his wish to be part of an international artistic aristocracy. Most importantly of all, I believe, we may see in Akutagawa's recourse to and subversion of myth a radical illumination of the contemporary mythologisation of culture which ostensibly divorced it from politics but was in fact a highly political act.

Akutagawa's admission of "a vague anxiety" (*bonyaritoshita fuan*) as the underlying reason for his suicide has been interpreted by such Marxist critics as Miyamoto Kenji as the defeated logic of a decadent bourgeoisie,

anachronistically disengaged from historical and social reality (quoted in Lippit 2002, p.39). Others[63] looked to inscribe his death within a wider narrative about modernity in which neurasthenia could be ascribed to the discordance of modern civilisation and insanity could be seen as an index of superior sensitivity, turning suicide into an aestheticised apotheosis (Sontag 1991, p.48). In either case it is clear that the writer's personal anguish has been variously transformed into a symptomatic metaphor for a wider historical trauma. To search for reasons for Akutagawa's suicide is to invest in the biographism of the *shōsetsu ronsō* more value than it merits and to make glib comparisons between Akutagawa's state of mind and the "anxiety" of the age is to merely reinforce the aestheticisation of his suicide. What is interesting however is to discern how Akutagawa has been discursively retransfigured, confirming his very belief in the writerly nature of culture. Rather than look with Lippit for signs of the "disintegrating mechanisms of subjectivity" that apparently prefigured his descent into madness and despair, I would rather turn to the writer's continued problematisation of myth making which became more pointed as the 1920s advanced.

The closing down of cultural discourse in the later 1920s has been well documented[64]. Popular reaction to government policy could provoke police action or even lead to murder as in the case of Diet member Yamamoto Senji who was assassinated for criticising the Peace Preservation Law in 1926. Such

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[63] See for instance Howard Hibbet 1970, 'Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and the Negative Ideal'. *In*: Craig and Shively (eds), *Personality in Japanese History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.425–51.

[64] See for instance Andrew Barshay 1988, *State and Intellectual in Imperial Japan: The Public Man in Crisis*; Leslie Pincus 1996, *Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan*; and Sheldon Garon 1997, *Molding Japanese Minds: the State in Everyday Life*.

was the importance of censorship by public opinion that many Japanese feared being dismissed from their posts for political or social criticism (Nolte 1987, p.33). March 1928 saw the mass arrest of Communists and their sympathisers, effectively marking the beginning of the end of the proletarian movement in Japan. What Barshay terms "the cocoon option" – complete submersion in unpolitical life – has been exaggerated into the so-called *tenkō* or sudden coerced ideological apostasy to the "national cause" of the early 1930s (Barshay 1988, p.25). Critics were forced to channel their writings within state-sanctioned boundaries (Forster's "slighter gestures of dissent") and many retreated from politics as they had done temporarily after 1911.

Ironically it was the Modernists whose so-called "pure novel" revitalised an interiorised subjectivity and diluted a sense of historical agency which would become the literature of retrenchment in the 1930s. Their manifesto was surely the modernist writer Yokomitsu's 1935 *Junsui shōsetsuron* (*Essay on the Pure Novel*) which set out a lineage for novels from *monogatari* and pure literature with the classical genres of *nikki* (diaries) and *zuihitsu* (essays / miscellaneous writings) (Hayter 2008, p.52). At the end of the essay Yokomitsu gestures towards the *minzoku*, the nation, as a sanctified topos which would heal the ideological fissures of Modernism (p.52). Hence in the discourse on pure literature which began in the mid 1920s and peaked in the mid 1930s there is an ideological undercurrent which sets out a metaphysics of timeless Japan. The obsession with origins and the magnification of a nativist genealogy is a central epistemological strategy of the culturalist discourse. "New Sensationists" such as Yokomitsu and Kawabata pursued their logic of subjective interiority and in so doing reified culture as a decontextualised sign and repository of

value. Hayter shows how 1920s anxiety about cultural boundaries were brought about by the loss of previously stable matrices of reference, the deterritorialising movements of capitalism and the international trade in ideas and goods, epitomised perhaps by Yokomitsu's *Shanghai* (1928–31). We have seen how the *shōsetsu ronsō* of the mid 1920s was part of the quest for origins, an attempt to recuperate a sense of cultural lineage and create an indigenous literary history in response to the convulsions of Modernism and Marxism, a movement which would reach its apogee in the 1930s cultural revival. It is an irony that Japanese Modernism was simultaneously an atomising and totalising movement. In the late 1920s and certainly in the 1930s, "culture" became an index of national essence, a reification of the romantic notion of *Kultur*.

From History to Myth: Mythologisation[65] and the Will to Knowledge

As in literature, so in history. Nolte has shown how we might see Taishō history as Taishō politics in microcosm (1987, p.132). The expansion of universities as ideological centres had been notable since the Meiji drive to promote public enlightenment through popularised history or cultural history (*bunmeishi*). The ethnographic impulse had been in evidence since the disciplinisation of

[65] We shall understand "mythologisation" in the Bakhtinian sense of removing an idea from the historical realm in order for it to exist in an uncontested world and thereby exempt it from any challenge to the reigning order. See Bakhtin (1981), *The Dialogic Imagination*. See also Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957). For Barthes, common modern commodities have become mythologised, abstracted or reified and imbued with profound ideological meaning which appears to be naturalised.

philology and Folk Studies (*minzokugaku*) in 1900 (Kōnoshi 2000, p.61). The late Meiji national literature movement had seen the revalorisation of "classics" like the *Manyōshū* as part of the quest to find a national epic (Shirane 2000, p.18). The early Taishō emphasis on the folk as the seat of authentic culture, popularised by scholars like Yanagita Kunio and Ueda Bin grew out of the Meiji civilisational rhetoric of national character and was a smart ideological reversal of the top-down cultural model. Yet the elaboration of the folk as the natural seat of culture was also central to the development of the imperial mythology and attempted to bind the folk to the emperor system in a natural ethnic union. The ideological transformation of myth to authenticate the modern emperor system saw the elevation of founding myths such as the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* (*Chronicles of* Japan, 720) (Kōnoshi 2000, p.51) to which Akutagawa alluded, for example in 'The Peach Boy' as we shall see in chapter three.

Akutagawa looks again at the power of myth and imagery in the entry 'Buki' (Weapons') in 'A Dwarf's Words'. He deconstructs the significance of the Yūshūkan, the Japanese military and war museum maintained by the Yasukuni Shrine established as a paean to imperial might and national spirit. This entry which is scathing on the glorification of violence in the name of the state and various other ideologies such as socialism sits next to 'Shōni' ('Young Child') which delineates the similarity between the military man and the child, unthinking as he bangs the drum and sounds the trumpet while he marches to the beat of whatever war song happens to be in the ascendant. More scathing still is the observation in 'Buki' that the Japanese fascination with "justice" goes hand in hand with the inculcation of fear and is curiously never at odds with Japanese commercial interests. Immediately after the entry 'Buki' is the section

on ‘Sonnō (‘Reverence for the Emperor’) which elliptically relates the seventeenth-century French story of the Abbé Choisy who failed to find a euphemism to adequately express the madness of Charles VI. It is evident from these entries and others that Akutagawa was fiercely aware of the use of myth in strengthening imperial might in the Taishō era and that such an ideological move was something to be suspected, if not feared.

The ideological import of the development of folkloric studies (*minzokugaku*) from the early 1900s and its concomitant elaboration of the *kokutai* (the national polity) lies in the fact that it contests history as progress and appears to preserve instead an unchanging national essence. In this way it radically subverts the Enlightenment view of history which had been the ideological foundation of Meiji and marks a shift not only towards culture but also towards Culturalism. While the middle Meiji nativist narrative might be seen to combat the march of modernisation, the later identification of the folk with the state was part of the state’s appropriation of folkloric thinking to strengthen its ideological foundation (Harootunian 1990, p.101). By appealing to native cultural practices and appropriating the folklorist conception of a fixed identity of sameness it effectively became impossible to contest the state (Harootunian 1990, p.107). The disciplinisation of native knowledge which saw the *furusato* or native place as the spiritual home of Japan was part of the presumption of state power, the creation of a cultural totality (Harootunian 1990, p.125). Efforts to constitute the folk as part of an ethnological discourse required of course their voicelessness and this attempt at cultural ventriloquism guaranteed political assent in essentialising a supremely normative conception of culture (Harootunian 1990, p.127).

The turn from history to myth in this project was central. While Yanagita's nativism had initially been part of the teleology to establish the present as the modern centre, subsequent dehistoricisation and the emphasis on place rather than time turned history into a metaphysics of essences and was an ideological manœuvre Akutagawa, Ōgai and others regarded with suspicion. Scholar functionaries legitimated the timeless idea of the *kokutai* as in the *History of the Theories of National Polity* (*Kokutai ron shi*) which was completed by the Shrine Bureau of the Home Ministry in 1919 (Barshay 1988, p.201), part of the attempt to create through history, then myth, a national community with a strong emotional appeal and an incontestable intellectual legitimacy. Nitobe's 1907 *Momotarō Doctrine* was another example of such a manœuvre. This tale which had been standardised under Meiji and included in the newly compulsory state education system in the form of primary school reading books (*Shōgaku kokugo tokuhon*) from 1886 was strategically chosen by Nitobe in his attempt to unite and excite the Japanese imagination to encourage territorial expansion in South-East Asia (Polen 1999, p.160 and Howes 1995, p.167). The tale premised a homogenous nation based on common origin and lauded the Japanese as a commanding race with moral superiority over the uncultivated "devils" outside its island borders (Antoni 1991, p.166). It had the credibility of a realist style and the aura of an indisputable myth. The appropriation of such mythology by the colonial project will be looked at in depth in chapter three.

Hobsbawm's famous work *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) shows how traditions arise and are invented as a collective response to rapid socio-political change and as an assertion of group identity in the face of threat (Palmer 2005, p.xii). We have seen how territorial enlargement and internal threats posed by

social change involved a concomitant reinvention of Japanese identity. Fujitani has superbly demonstrated this invention of tradition in Meiji Japan as he located the beginnings of mass nationalism in the focus on folk culture (1988, p.29). Bakhtin has written extensively about the ideology at play in replacing historical time with folk / mythological time in the quest for an absolute past which only becomes necessary when there is anxiety about other cultures (1981, p.96). Myths of national origins represent the order as eternal and the narrative of fictive ethnicity represents populations as if they formed a natural community. Kawabata's intuitive subjectivity and eastern mysticism and Tanizaki's praise of auratic shadows are atavistic interpretations of such myths[66].

Karatani has argued that the structure of interiority in place by the third decade of the Meiji served to efface the political (1993, p.44) and we might see the reinvigoration of the *watakushi shōsetsu* in the 1920s as a further reverberation of this manœuvre. Similarly, Ueda maintains that the understanding of literature underwent an epistemological shift beginning in the 1880s when literature came into being as an ontological category as modern fiction (2005). This is also the moment, she argues, when literature became "the effaced realm of the political". Culturalism is the logical outcome of such a paradigm and can be seen in the historical as well as the literary domains. If culture and history were effectively aestheticised to displace social antagonisms and quell political disquiet then art and literature increasingly assumed a compensatory position.

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[66] See in particular Kawabata Yasunari's 1968 *Utsukushii Nihon no watashi* (*Japan the Beautiful and Myself*) and Tanizaki Junichirō's 1933 *Inei raisan* (*In Praise of Shadows*).

If there is a complicity between modernist discourses and proto-fascist ideology then it is latent in its obsessive mythologisation[67]. Nietzsche, whom Akutagawa admired, challenged the pursuit of origins and mythical genealogies and saw within it a malign will to knowledge. He famously described how religion or sacralisation is part of this mythology and one more means of overcoming resistance in order to rule (p.86). In the 1927 work 'The Man from the West' Akutagawa refers to Nietzsche as he turns his attentions to the Christian narrative, undermining its authenticity by asserting that there were, in fact, many Christs, thereby leading the reader to question this most sacrosanct of myths as we shall see in depth in chapter five.

Throughout this vein of criticism there is a continuing paradox: the nationalist discourse such as that being formed in Japan in the 1920s was the product of a modern secular consciousness but which mythologised an imagined community going back to antiquity and beyond. Yet the Taishō critical terrain was more variegated then has been acknowledged and the nascent mythologisation of history did not go unnoticed. Barshay points out that cultural historian Tsuda Sōkichi was one such critic. Beginning in 1916 but particularly from 1924–30 he had published a series of studies that argued, according to Barshay, that "Japan's mythical heritage as recorded in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* was the intentional product of a far later age and of a ruling group in need of a legitimising source for its hegemony" (quoted in Barshay 1988, p.30). Unsurprisingly Tsuda eventually ran afoul of the publication and lèse-majesté laws.

[67] Walter Benjamin saw that myth takes over at a time when historical forms of thought are discredited (Eagleton 1990, p.319).

Indeed Ōgai's later interest in history sprang from the need to distinguish it from myth. He noted the paradox which bound myth to modernity when he wrote: "With a modern education you could hardly regard myth and history as being one and the same thing" (quoted in Bowring 1979, pp.191–192). To push for a clear distinction between myth and history invited censorship and dismissal as the government actively arrested rational enquiry in literary and intellectual circles. Nogi's suicide of 1912 displayed the full potential of myth-making power and by this time the amalgam of myth and history taught to children had become the norm (Bowring 1979, p.193). Akutagawa was acutely aware of this fiction, the levelling of myth and history and the collusion of the realist form in sustaining the illusion. Not only will we see that myth itself is demystified in stories such as 'The Peach Boy' and 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab*'* but the historical is as persistent as the reliability of the author in creating a will to knowledge.

Inevitably, Akutagawa's suicide in 1927 became a resounding metaphor for the apparent impasse of his age. The inauguration in 1935 of the Akutagawa Prize for Literature canonised pure literature and institutionalised the separation between high and low fiction. Akutagawa was held as a beacon of Culturalism and his suicide was presented as an ideological act: the defeated logic of a decadent bourgeoisie, disengaged from historical and social reality (Lippit 2002, p.39).

The aim of our introduction has been to situate Akutagawa within the historical, political and literary context which defined his youth and writing career as well as to indicate those areas which it is hoped our close reading of a

representative sample of his writings will elucidate further. Let us turn our attentions now to four disparate texts which demonstrate the proselytising potential of narrative at a time when various cultural discourses were competing for ideological terrain.

Chapter Two

Butōkai (*The Ball*, 1920): Romance and Cultural Narcissism

> Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. […] Now, do you really imagine that the Japanese people, as they are presented to us in art, have any existence? […] In fact the whole of Japan is a pure invention. (Wilde, *The Decay of Lying*, 1889 [1986] pp.79 and 82)

> But when he reached Japan, he [the devil] found things quite different from what he had read in Marco Polo's Travels while still in the West. ('Tobacco and the Devil', 1916 ARZ2:19)

We begin our close readings with 'The Ball', a paean to cliché and to the power of romance and artistic stereotype. Generic Meiji *débutante* meets nameless dashing French naval officer at a ball. Each appears enraptured with the other, sharing a moment of romantic wistfulness before presumably never meeting again. A succinct articulation of Akutagawa's view of how we apprehend the world, it presents a powerful metaphor for cultural representation and sets the absurdity of orientalist and occidentalist (self-) imaginings in Europe and Japan in the late Meiji in wry relief while nodding to the ideology at work beneath Taishō cultural politics. Like a great many other of Akutagawa's stories and certainly like 'The Peach Boy' and 'The Man from the West', 'The Ball' is inherently intertextual and as such toys with ideas of originality and authenticity. Indeed it is the very intertextuality of 'The Ball', the way in which the story depends for meaning on the reader's prior knowledge and preconceptions that

makes it perhaps the very paradigm of Akutagawan aesthetics. An inauthentic text, it is an ambivalent rejoinder to the work of the fascinating and complex French writer Pierre Loti (1850–1923), whose orientalising story 'A Ball in Edo' is the trite "original" to Akutagawa's undisguised parody.

In this chapter we will begin by exploring the Taishō romanticisation and problematisation of Meiji history as evidenced in some of Akutagawa's works from 1917. We will then engage with the European artistic and literary background of orientalist representations of Japan in order to situate the "original" text upon which Akutagawa based his version of 'The Ball', Pierre Loti's 'A Ball in Edo'. This will enable us to then interact with the most recent criticism of 'The Ball' which has been conducted from the discursive standpoint of orientalism / counter-orientalism. At this point, we will then be in a position to move away from the prevalent discursive binary in order to further develop our understanding of Akutagawa's view of stereotype as fundamental to representation and subjectivity.

Romanticising History

Let us begin with the question of historical understanding and representation. In its romantic historicisation of the recent past, 'The Ball' is a double metafictional commentary on the ways in which cultural knowledge is formed and disseminated: not only is it an exploration of the ways in which the Meiji imagined itself but also how Taishō imaginings of its Meiji forebears illuminated

Taishō self-imagining. In its showcasing of the notorious Rokumeikan period[68] of Japanese self-fashioning and its controversial turn towards the West in the 1880s, 'The Ball' shows how such self-representation was embedded within a wider politics of cultural identification, each mediation as inauthentic as the last without a legitimate original as touchstone. By historicising this period, as well as implying the orientalist mode within the Loti "original", Akutagawa raises anxious questions about cultural hybridity and performativity for those readers in the 1920s who continued to question westernisation, consumerism and its concomitant attempt to rescue culture in an original form.

It is a common feature of Akutagawa's work that the narrator draws attention to an opaque historicity in his retelling of accepted stories. Indeed, historicising Meiji is a theme to which Akutagawa returns often from about 1917 to 1920 and 'The Ball' needs to be understood in this context. Not only must the early Meiji have seemed archaic to Taishō eyes and therefore experientially out of reach but the fact that there were Meiji eyewitnesses whose accounts and written testimonies gave the lie to historical veracity clearly fascinated Akutagawa. He constantly returned to what he saw to be the instability of the eyewitness account and therefore of the historical record, as in the speculative 'Mitsu no naze' ('Three Whys', 1926) which discretely treats the plasticity of historical fact. On this view, expanded in many other works such as 'The Death of a Martyr'

[68] The so-called Rokumeikan era refers to the movement from the late 1870s led by Foreign Minister Inoue to westernise Japan in order to claim cultural parity with the Western Powers. It served as the cultural backdrop to the attempt to renegotiate the Unequal Treaties. The Rokumeikan building, designed by British architect Josiah Conder and completed in 1880, became a controversial symbol of rapid Meiji westernisation. For an in-depth appraisal of this period see Bryson 2003, p.92.

and ‘Samayoeru Yudayajin’ (‘The Wandering Jew’ 1917), we interpret the world according to our immediate concerns so that “facts” themselves have no inherent meaning. For example, ‘Saigō Takamori’ (1917)[69] deals with the writing of Meiji History for a Taishō readership. Its narrator recounts the story of a near contemporary at university, a historian named Honda whose encounter with a person of questionable identity makes him doubt what he thought he knew about the death or survival of the famous samurai Saigō Takamori. The gentleman of Honda’s acquaintance makes the following observation which might summarise the thrust of many of Akutagawa’s stories:

> First, ask yourself what are the historical references for which you have a predilection; then examine them. […] Generally the more critical our approach to history, the more we find that nowhere is there any reliable historical data. […] In practice we cannot even judge the facts of something that has happened before our eyes. (translated by Kojima and McVittie in McVittie and Pell (eds) 1964, p.285)

‘An Enlightenment Husband’ is another work of this period which casts a critical eye on the romantic reconstruction of Meiji and as such forms a pendant to ‘The Ball’. Like ‘The Ball’, it looks upon the ghosts of the Meiji age as at a museum, a representation always tantalisingly at one remove – either through the recollections of Viscount Honda and “the exhibition room of his memories” or

[69] Saigō Takamori is the name of one of the most influential samurai in Japanese history, living during the late Edo Period and early Meiji Era. He has been dubbed the last true samurai and must have appeared to be very pre-modern to a Taishō readership.

through the prints in the Ueno Museum which forms the setting for the story[70]. This story, rather like 'The Ball' is concerned with the manufacture of historical consciousness through voiceless artefacts on the one hand and the distorted subjectivity of perception both by contemporary actors and modern-day spectators on the other. Both stories rely on the frame story for meaning in recalling scenes from the past which are literally framed as pictures, representational stereotypes which mirror the *idées reçues* which act as the guiding narratives of this highly mediated age. The image of the young Miura reading Hugo's *Les Orientales* beneath a portrait of Napoléon recounted to the narrator at an exhibition of prints by Honda gives a sense of narrative *mise en abyme* and an attempt to understand the world through clichés which leaves the reader with a sense of loss and frustration at the very inaccessibility of the past on the one hand and the inescapable subjectivity of understanding on the other. 'An Enlightenment Husband' is a story about life imitating art, of a man who replaced one romantic idea with another and who only interacted with life through the contorting lens of French romanticism. The Meiji era appears as a picturesque age in which the confrontation between "Japan" and "the West" only took place in mediated form: through pictures, words and commodities projected on to the other. Akutagawa confirms this vision in his entry in 'A Dwarf's Words' entitled 'Koi wa shi yori mo tsuyoshi' 'Love is Stronger than Death' when he admits that what is actually stronger is "Bovarism" (ARZ13:52):

> To say that love is stronger than death is a careless assertion. At a glance, when love seems to be stronger than death, what

[70] We will see how Akutagawa reinvents narrators and characters – Honda and Akiko being obvious examples in this context and we might ask whether Akutagawa might have been Balzacian in design.

> actually rules is what the French call Bovarism. We ourselves romanticise our loves like the daydreamer Madame Bovary. This is sentimentalism. (ARZ13:52)

Our tendency to romanticise ourselves and our loves like the daydreamer Madame Bovary is de facto sentimentalism and is the means by which we interact with the world. Indeed our opening quotations point to the cultural filter which colours our vision: the first is taken from Wilde's influential *The Decay of Lying* and is directly referenced in 'Subjective Portraits' in which Akutagawa recalls that neither London fog existed before the Impressionists imagined it nor cypress trees before Van Gogh had created them (1996 [1924] ARZ11:194). The second quotation is taken from 'Tobacco and the Devil' in which we read with bathos of the Devil's disappointment on reaching Japan that what he finds does not match his expectations based on his reading of Marco Polo.

Life Imitating Art

Like 'An Enlightenment Husband', 'The Ball' is also a story about life imitating art and is a more obvious palimpsest in that it is an explicit rewriting of a work which is itself a stereotype in order to expose the contaminated nature of our supposedly original perceptions. That Akutagawa chose to rewrite Loti's 'A Ball in Edo' is an illustration of his fascination with the power of cliché over lived experience. Pierre Loti was a classically orientalist writer whose stories, set variously in Turkey, Morocco and Japan, were entirely formulaic and relied on a

pre-existing understanding of the "Orient" shaped by cultural artefacts to allow the consumer a vicarious enjoyment of a romantic spectacle. They typically involved the persona of Loti, a European naval officer, who goes native in various colonial locations and narrates the romantic opportunities afforded him by local women. His sexual escapades are inevitably curtailed by his return to the seas, thereby bringing about not only the restoration of order but also the pretext for their future continuation. Akutagawa admired the power of Loti's craft in 'Pierre Loti no shi' ('The Death of Pierre Loti', 1923), marvelling at the self-fashioned Mesdames Chrysanthème tripping down the Paris streets in homage to their creator rather as he did the Ginza girls who only existed after Renoir ('Subjective Portraits', ARZ11:193). Akutagawa's version of Loti's universal story is very much a *mise en abyme* of this process of self-romanticisation and demonstrates the way in which cultural meaning is always only ever produced by reference to another text rather than to a foundational reality.

Loti's romantic formula – of which *Madame Chrysanthème* is surely the most famous articulation – was hugely popular and his stories have been regarded as uncomplicated examples of Said's orientalising will to power (Kawakami 2005, p.39). While they may in fact be more subtle than this simple reading allows, it is certainly true that Loti understood the cultural economy in which he was working and used it to his advantage. It is not by chance that Europe's expansionist project coincided with its scientific and intellectual appropriation of racial hierarchy and the inevitably racialised iterations of Darwinian evolution which constructed the enlightened West as the centre of

progress.[71] For instance, in describing in *Madame Chrysanthème* Japan's ripe virginity bursting to be plucked after years of seclusion, the narrator taps in to pre-existing stereotypes: "What a country of verdure and shade is Japan, what an unexpected Eden."(1989 [1888], p.13) Similarly in *Japoneries d'Automne* (1889) in which collection his 'A Ball in Edo' also appeared, the narrator personifies the "sacred" city of Kyoto as a corrupted Eve figure, spoilt by industrial progress, thereby embedded in an antagonistic Eurocentric vision of modernity and purity: "Until very recently she was inaccessible to Europeans, mysterious, now one can get there by railway, one might say that she has become ordinary, fallen, finished" (1889, p.1).

Such a formula proved commercially successful and the French writer wrote over forty novels, travelogues and short stories, averaging thirty to thirty-five thousand copies for each book. In short he turned the commodification of the Orient into a personally very lucrative product. When Loti died in 1923, his embalmed body was brought home for a three-day state funeral (Turberfield 2008, p.64). Written two years before his election to the *Académie française* in 1891 when he was at the height of his popularity, *Japoneries d'automne* is emblematic of the orientalist cultural economy. It is no coincidence that Loti's acclaim coincided with the Third Republic's imperial resurgence following the set-back of the Franco-Prussian War in 1870–1 and Szyyliowicz claims that the popularity of the orientalist genre was certainly a strong reason for Loti's election to the *Académie Française* in 1891 (1998, p.2).[72]

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[71] The ideas of the Frenchman Gobineau (1816–1882), whose racialist theory of the Aryan master race he expounded in his book *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853–55), took Europe by storm.

[72] Let us not forget that by the start of the twentieth century, France had carved out French Indochina, adding to its foothold in Shanghai as well as forming a

Loti's election to the *Académie Française* tells an important story about cultural values in France at the end of the nineteenth century because it was at the expense of the naturalist writer Emile Zola who would become embroiled in the Dreyfus Affair. While Zola's writing did not shy away from the tensions inherent in the French articulation of the nation state as it came to terms with itself following defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, Loti basked in the romanticised image he projected of a culturally superior nation. Nevertheless, if Zola was mysteriously asphyxiated following the acquittal of Dreyfus, Loti would fall from favour in the 1920s and 1930s when the *mission civilisatrice* came under criticism by the socialist movement. His work has since been removed from the literary canon: a metaphor perhaps for the excision from the historical record of the racist supremacism upon which the colonial project was predicated[73].

In the success of his various *japoneries*, Loti revealed an image of Japan which was already a palimpsest of cultural referentiality tied up in colonial politics and commercialism, readily understood and consumed by its late nineteenth-century French audience. 'A Ball in Edo' is true to Lotian form. It depicts a recognisably *japoniste* setting in which a doll-like Japanese débutante falls for a typically suave French naval officer at an elegant ball at the Rokumeikan in Tokyo. Loti capitalised on the vogue for *japonisme* and had an intelligent understanding of contemporary tastes made popular not only by artists such as Monet and Van Gogh but also by objects freely available to purchase by the aspiring middle classes at the new Parisian department stores

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protectorate in Tunisia and colonies in large parts of northern, western and central Africa.

[73] See Kawakami (2005), p.16

(Kawakami 2002, p.279). Writing for an audience which by the 1880s was familiar with a commodified image of Japan through mass-produced lacquerware and cheap prints, he took contemporary exoticist tropes to extremes.

By the time Akutagawa penned his version of Loti's story, this genre of *japoniste* writing looked just as outdated as the Meiji Rokumeikan project (1879 to 1887) itself which had been proposed as an urgent response to the anxiety in the 1880s that Japan had to "catch up" with the West. The Rokumeikan itself had been conceived as a space in which cultured Japanese could mix freely with western visitors in an atmosphere thought to be akin to the civilised social whirl of London or Paris (Bryson 2003, p.90). Yet as a response to the perceived threat of cultural backwardness, the Rokumeikan was itself a pastiche of an idea, a cliché of Japanese perceptions of European panache. British architect Josiah Conder had to be sensitive to the pan-European sensibilities of his patrons in avoiding too direct an association with any one European national style (Bryson 2003, p.92). Its Louvre-like roof was designed to reflect the majesty of Paris while the open arcades on two storeys were imagined to convey a sense of Renaissance Italy. It was hoped that the high porches would resemble those in the grand entranceways of British architecture in India. Inside there were drawing rooms, a library, a billiard room, a music room, a ballroom (the setting for Loti and Akutagawa's stories) and a dining room catered for by a French master chef. There were concerts of western music, banquets, tea dances and balls all designed to show off Japanese civilisation to its western guests to perfection. While it was a spectacle of westernisation, it would inevitably be marred by accusations of unbridled

Occidentalist imitation. The pinnacle of anti-Rokumeikan criticism occurred in the wake of the Count Ito Ball in April 1887 which was itself a jumble sale of stereotype. This most famous ball saw the count appearing as a Venetian nobleman, his wife as a Spaniard and other guests dressed in Louis XIV or as Tyrolean peasants. It was truly a fancy-dress performance of modernity. The backlash was immense. An article appeared in *Mizuen* deploring the mimicry:

> Current education is a matter of plastering western civilisation on one's person – and not merely plastering, either, for they are not satisfied until the body itself changes into that of a westerner. Moreover, we have reached the point where some people advocate not only changing the body into that of a westerner, but also turning the spirit into that of a westerner, so that in the end all human races will turn into western races (quoted in Bryson 2003, p.98)

So it was that the Rokumeikan quickly became shorthand for the era 1884–9 defined by the desire to imitate an image of the West, a metaphor for the hotchpotch of cultural stereotypes which directed a comically confused misrepresentation of a culture still foreign and apprehended entirely through images and artefacts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Rokumeikan was eventually demolished in 1935 and was no doubt viewed as a queer and undesirable reminder of the early Meiji cultural project (Watanabe 1996, p.25). The parallels with Loti's reputational demise here are striking and it would be curious to consider how Akutagawa might have viewed their cultural extermination each for politically opposing reasons.

Orientalism and Counter-Orientalism?

Given the political background to the Rokumeikan and to the reception in France of Loti's work, it is hardly surprising that a great deal of recent criticism has focused on questions of orientalist politics. David Rosenfeld for instance embeds his treatment of 'The Ball' squarely within the oppositional discursive paradigm of orientalism / counter-orientalism (2000, pp 53–63). He makes the case that Akutagawa's rewriting of Loti's 1889 short story 'A Ball in Edo' should be seen as an example of "literary resistance to an imperial text in the Japanese context" (2000, p.53). Rosenfeld asserts the writer's militant desire to reverse the colonial will to power when he notes that:

> Akutagawa inscribes his resistant subject within the discursive space delimited by the earlier, colonising text, seeking to wrest control of that space, and of the representation of that historical moment, from the voice of the imperial subject. Without any overt criticism of the earlier text, Akutagawa's manipulation of it implicitly demonstrates his resentment of its cultural chauvinism. (p.54)

Keeping one eye firmly on Spivak, Rosenfeld wonders whether, by engaging with the colonial gaze and by arguing on its terms, the text ultimately remains defined by its vision, unable to escape the ideological parameters which fix its articulation. Yet if he sees in the French naval officer a walking symbol of the threat of imperialism, he also detects a central ambivalence within the Japanese writer's version: in the apparent cultural equality between the naval officer and the protagonist Akiko, as demonstrated by her mastery of French etiquette and

language and the recognition by the Chinese of the dazzling superiority of the Japanese nation personified by Akiko. Rosenfeld sees this Taishō text caught in a double bind: it stakes a claim for cultural parity with the West that Loti's text had vehemently denied but it does so by enacting the Eurocentric notion of civilisation and progress through the infliction of the colonial project upon the Chinese. In Akutagawa's text, the Rokumeikan is the theatre of a burgeoning Japanese colonialism and offers a subtle mirroring of the western orientalist mentality. Following Stefan Tanaka (1993) and Komori Yōichi (2001), Rosenfeld suggests that this story demonstrates Japan's internalisation by 1920 of the European conception of progress and, in an uneasily triumviral relationship with both Europe and Asia, was attempting to assert its own cultural identity as at once equal with Europe and superior to Asia which it was attempting to colonise. In his seminal text *Postcolonial*, Komori describes Japan's enlightenment and civilisation as a process of self-colonisation whereby Japan recreated itself in the image of the Western powers in order to avoid the fate of colonisation and to escape from being viewed as uncivilised by the Western nations (Tierney 2005, p.153):

> Japan hid the fact that it faced the imminent danger of colonisation by Western powers and presented its own "civilisation and enlightenment" as a spontaneous programme undertaken as an act of free will. It concealed the self-colonisation implicit in copying the Western powers and consigned it to oblivion; in that way, the nation's colonial unconscious was formed. Later, Japan had to discover "barbarians" in its neighbourhood and take control of their

> territories in order to prove that it was indeed civilised. (Komori 2001, p.15)

In Rosenfeld's view, the assertion of the right to (counter-) represent is at the heart of Akutagawa's reworking of Loti's text. According to him, in writing 'The Ball' Akutagawa wished to correct distorted orientalist depictions, challenge the authority of a western writer to narrate Japan and reclaim the right to set out the ideological foundation for mimesis.

However, in this chapter, I hope to demonstrate that Akutagawa's motivation in writing 'The Ball' did not lie principally in correcting a distorted vision of Japan by recourse to a notion of a reclaimed empirical authority but rather in showing the writerly ideological complicity of all performers whether Japanese or European in constructing and enacting all cultural myths and the Meiji nation-building myth in particular. His was not really a concern with fidelity to an extra-textual truth but rather with the fundamentally narrative will to power, the processes by which literary discourse posits an original identity and the ideological, even existential stakes involved in not challenging them.

A Politics of Identification

Through a sophisticated metafictional narrative style, Akutagawa draws attention not only to the politics of representation but also, more subtly, to the politics of identification: which narratives do we choose to adopt, invest in and

perform both for ourselves and for the actors around us? Which narratives do we choose to ignore? On this view, Akutagawa becomes less interested in wresting control of the historical voice in order to set out his more authentic version of reality but in revealing the often conflicting and possibly ultimately narcissistic visions of cultural articulation. In the portrayal of the French naval officer through Akiko's eyes, the narrator emphasises the fact that what he represents to her, what he is made to perform is more important and indeed more real than what he actually is. This truism of cross-cultural signification ultimately brings to the fore the solipsistic nature of representation in revealing that other cultural actors are ultimately only allowed to assume meaning when they inform the cultural identity of the self.

By animating in his story the specifically national stereotypes of the experienced and suave French officer and the innocent and charming young Japanese woman so forceful in the literary imagination, Akutagawa is commenting upon the ideological processes of signification underpinning the cultural status quo that are often ignored. Undoubtedly the clichéd romantic interaction of the two main characters engages with the Lotian gendered orientalist tactic but rather than simply reversing the Western / Oriental, masculine / feminine sexual stereotype as suggested by Rosenfeld, Akutagawa shows the protagonists to be actively engaged in the performance of national / sexual clichés and ultimately unable or indeed unwilling to escape them. While the French naval officer seems weary of the static persona he is destined endlessly to enact like some jaded Loti sickened by the prostituted role he is forced by his audience to perform, Akiko seems utterly unaware of her puppet-like performance and remains at once enchanted by the clichéd spectacle and

bemused by what she does not understand. The romantic illusion of cross-cultural communion is subtly unpacked by Akutagawa as a farcical act of solipsistic performance through the constant recourse to cliché and the complete non-communication of the protagonists.

The act of narration is central to this process of signification and it is the unquestioned realist mode that Akutagawa strives to problematise in this work as indeed in all his works. While ostensibly a paradigmatic realist work employing the prevalent free indirect style of its naturalist shōsetsu counterparts, 'The Ball' in fact attempts to radically defamiliarise the realist mode of representation and its ideological underpinnings. By bringing to the fore the stylistic devices that create the illusion of mimesis, 'The Ball' owes more to formalism than to the realist writers, in vogue at the time. That Akutagawa was less concerned with the epistemological foundation of mimesis than he was with the artist's power to evoke imaginatively is clear in 'The Death of Pierre Loti'. Although he wrote that Loti was neither a great writer in comparison with the giants of his day nor did he offer any new perspective on human life, he did acknowledge a new kind of Lotian description and lyrical poetry. Loti's orientalising tendency was acknowledged when he noted that, along with Koizumi Yakumo (Lafcadio Hearn), Loti was deeply connected with Japan whom he would "dress as a doll in patterns of Mount Fuji and camellias" (p.87). He goes on to suggest that while the Japan depicted by Loti might have been less truthful than that of Hearn, he was undeniably a good writer whose descriptions enchanted their Japanese readers as much as their French counterparts:

> Our sisters, after reading Loti's stories, would trip down the paving stones of Paris like Madame Chrysanthèmes or Madame Prunes. (p.88)

This last point is important because it shows that Akutagawa understood that the attraction of Loti's description for Japanese readers lay not only in its powerfully romantic stereotype of Paris but also in its very depiction of Japanese women as charming, dainty and, ultimately, orientalised. Akutagawa does not go on to dispute this representation but rather to praise the French writer for his convincing poetic imagination, his power to enchant the reader, whether European or Japanese through his evocative images, his facility to create and sustain desire in the reader who is not only complicit but also a willing partner in the creation of national personae.

In supporting his premise that Akutagawa was seeking to counter the orientalist vision of a feminised Japan, Rosenfeld suggests that he gave agency to that country by assuming the perspective of one of the women Loti had described and making her the protagonist of the tale, complete with her own name. By endowing Akiko with a "lively subjectivity", Rosenfeld argues that Akutagawa is challenging the French story's implicitly gendered colonial relationship (2000, p.58). Akiko's obviously cultured upbringing and the ease with which she converses with the naval officer in this cosmopolitan setting are seen to be indications that Japan was no longer the backward nation it had long been made out to be. However, in stressing Akiko's subjectivity and agency, Rosenfeld risks simplifying the narrative complexity of Akutagawa's story and overlooking important aspects of his style which have deeper implications as to

how this text might be read. It is to the seemingly uncomplicated realist style that we turn our attentions now in order to probe Akutagawa's indexical revelation of the ideological basis of exposition.

The Realist Mode Undone: The Unreliable Narrator

The realist style that characterised Loti's text and by which the narrator assumed an unassailably objective, empirical perspective seemingly based on incontrovertible facts directly experienced is subtly challenged in Akutagawa's version. Loti's text for example begins with the actual invitation that the narrator supposedly received to the famous Itō ball that did in fact take place and which of course scandalised the public. Such balls were part of the popular imagination and indeed in 'An Enlightenment Husband' the narrator, while gazing at a Meiji print, imagines being transported back to the Rokumeikan era and opening a newspaper to find a description of one of its famous balls. Loti's first-person narrative account of the evening gives the impression that it has just been experienced first-hand by a narrator with whom the reader is supposed to readily identify and who thereby allows the reader a vicarious eyepiece on the whole evening. That the narrator also makes use of often wildly derogatory metaphors which dehumanise and bestialise the Japanese he comes across is merely given greater credence by his overarching narrative stance.[74] Aimed at a

[74] Transporting guests to the ball, the jinriki-san are described as "human horses", pouncing "like a flight of crows" their big toe sticking out "like that of a monkey" as they made "apish gestures" (Loti 1889, p.80).

French audience (and those who dream of being part of a French audience), the text interpellates the reader and ingratiatingly positions her as part of the civilisational elect.

Akutagawa makes similar use of this first-person objective account although the effect is used to unsettle the reader as he interrogates rather than indulges her preconceptions. The opening lines employ a classically realist narrator whose exposition indicates a very readerly text:

> It was the evening of the 3rd November, the nineteenth year of the Meiji era. Akiko, the seventeen year-old daughter of the ---- ---- family, was making her way with her bald father up the stairs to the Rokumeikan where the ball was to be held. (ARZ5:248)

The credibility of the narrator is immediately substantiated by the extra-textual precision of the date and the location of the famous ball. Ironically, the excision of the family name at once encourages the reader to believe in the sensitivity of the narrator as he protects the identity of the protagonist just as it actually occludes her identity altogether. The omniscient narrator, a Lotian eye witness, quickly makes his personal presence clear when he observes the Chinese dignitaries' astonishment at Akiko's beauty: "As I was reflecting on this …" (p. 249). This narrator, who has an unexplained privileged access to the ball, relates the intimate conversation of the couple in the ballroom and then, an hour later, on the balcony. However, lacunae in the text cause him to fall short of his narrative responsibility both when he fails to account for the hour spent before the couple reappear on the balcony and when he abruptly interrupts the text at crucial emotional points. The first instance of this ellipsis occurs when the

French naval officer hints at a weary melancholy, itself a pose used by Loti in his own works:

> "It's not only Paris. Balls are the same everywhere," he added, half to himself. (p.254)

While the narrator had earlier expanded on Akiko's "pleasant anxiety", here he chooses not to account for the naval officer's feelings and in fact breaks the narration completely at this point. The second instance of the text's opacity again involves the "teacherly tone" of the French naval officer whose words end the first chapter. He glibly intones a hackneyed cliché of Japanese philosophy via a commonly-known French word:

> "Those fireworks are like our *vie*." (p.256)

No authorial commentary elucidates this statement and again the text breaks suddenly. Despite the realist device of direct speech, the lack of authorial interpretation as well as the accompanying ruptures unsettles the reader's faith in the authority of the narrator.

The reader's discomfort is deepened in the second chapter which opens by mirroring the realist mode of the beginning of the first chapter:

> It was the autumn of the seventh year of Taishō. En route to her holiday home in Kamakura, Akiko met a passing acquaintance, a young novelist, by chance on the train. (p.256)

The same specific temporal and geographical locus that began the first chapter once again inspires trust in the reader. However, just how this same narrator,

whose identity remains mysterious, came to be both at the ball in 1886 and, as a young man, in the same carriage of a train to Kamakura some thirty years later is not explained nor is what has happened to Akiko, now middle-aged Mrs H, in the intervening years. This Mrs H, we are told, then narrates her story to the "young novelist" but we are not privy to their conversation. The introduction of the unknown young novelist who has the ear of Mrs H seems to imply Akutagawa as the overarching narrator although absurdly he would not have been born when the events of the first chapter took place.

Furthermore, if this were a classic frame story then Akiko would have narrated her own story in the first chapter and reappeared as an older woman in the second. Even though she gives her own account of the story to the young novelist, the story is not narrated from her perspective unless we are to believe in her self-objectification. The narration becomes further complicated when we learn that the young writer encountered on the train believes the French commissioned naval officer of the ball to be the famous writer Pierre Loti although Mrs H maintains that his real identity was Julien Viaud (Loti's real name). Disingenuously Mrs H draws attention to the distinction between the "real person" Viaud, and the literary persona, Loti who was believed to write autobiographically but was in fact a fabulist. In this circuitous way, rather than corroborating the "facts", the ostensibly realist recourse to extra-textual voices which characterises the short second chapter actually utterly undermines them.

This real-time framing device, which floats awkwardly like an addendum, is narrated by the same unknown narrator who reports speech but offers no authorial comment thus leaving the reader as perplexed as Akiko. The identities of the protagonists as well as the narrator remain unexplained: Akiko / Mrs H,

the French naval officer / Julien Viaud / Pierre Loti and the narrator / the young novelist / Akutagawa. By using the Lotian device of entangling real and fictional characters, Akutagawa actually reverses the Loti effect and makes a mockery of the notion of a credible realism. The appendix device, usually used to clarify events in order to position the reader's attitude towards the tale, here draws attention to both the protagonist's and the narrator's lack of understanding, ending the story ambiguously and without conclusion.

In this complicated exposition, the idea of the authoritative narrator is absurd and the story is that of a fictional Loti character told by a woman who does not believe in Loti as narrated years later by a young writer who is not necessarily the author. In this superbly unstable text, the author makes use of precisely those realist narrative devices: the frame story, the omniscient narrator, "real" characters and direct speech in order to undermine the authority of this seemingly true story and call into question the ontological basis of mimetic narrative itself.

Akutagawa's story was radical because it questioned the contemporary valorisation of realism and its implicit will to knowledge as demonstrated by the contemporary prestige accorded to the I-novel, the *watakushi shōsetsu* as well as the popularity of Loti's works in Japan although this was not acknowledged at the time. Loti's seminal work of 1887, *Madame Chrysanthème*, was translated and published in Japanese by Nogami Toyoichiro in 1914 (Miyasaka 2000, p.489). Nogami mirrors Loti's own assertion of the historical veracity of the story when he prefaces Loti's own preface by asserting that the Madame Chrysanthème would now be an old lady living in Nagasaki:

> Pierre Loti who would long ago take the tiny yellow hand of young Madame Chrysanthème as they strolled around the outskirts of Nagasaki is now an old man of sixty-five. […] That same Madame Chrysanthème may now still be living in Nagasaki somewhere as someone's wife, someone's mother. (Quoted in Miyasaka 2000, p.489.)

Loti's pose as an empirical writer was therefore given credence by Nogami who unwittingly elaborated the performance for a modern audience. Akutagawa's deliberate post-scriptural *mise en abyme* obviously thematises contemporary credulity surrounding the realist text in general and Loti's text in particular.

The ending change is crucial to understanding Akutagawa's motivations in writing this piece. Miyasaka explains that when the work first appeared in *Shinchō* in 1920 it ended with Mrs H admitting that Julien Viaud was indeed Pierre Loti. After its initial appearance, the *Tokyo Nichi Nichi Shinbun* called it a high-class rakugo[75] and Akutagawa purportedly rewrote the ending to the effect that Mrs H was unaware of the "true" identity of the French commissioned naval officer. The rewritten story then appeared in *Bunshū Sekai* and Akutagawa argued that if Akiko knew that the naval officer was Loti then she would merely become a voice-piece for the author and would be much more closed as a character (Miyasaka 2000, p.486). Even now contemporary criticism focuses on the question of mimesis in the ending and typically questions whether Akiko was pure of heart in her love for the French officer, whoever he was, or stupid in her ignorance (Miyasaka 2000, p.487). By giving the work a further layer of

[75] Rakugo involve a lone storyteller, the rakugoka, who depicts a long and complicated comical story always involving the dialogue of two or more characters.

ambivalence and allying it with a notoriously orientalist text on Japan, Akutagawa draws attention to the fine line between fact and fiction and to the importance of subjective rather than objective integrity.

This exposure of the reading public's credulous acceptance of Loti's tales as true was in fact ahead of its time. Akutagawa often played with the reader's credulity and with the presumed legitimacy of the historical record. One of the most famous examples of this was in 'The Death of a Martyr' in which the classic device of the explanatory postscript is turned on its head to utterly deceive the reader in its claim to authenticity. In this postscript, the narrator claims that he is presenting a legend from the Japanese 1596 *Legenda Aurea* which was written by northern Jesuits to aid their evangelist mission and published in the Nagasaki Church. He describes in detail the paper and the script as well as the difficulties he had as a reader in deciphering certain sections. Contemporary readers apparently believed the story to be true and were outraged when the frame story was revealed to be a fabrication (Sekiguchi (ed.) 2000, p.518). Indeed, the *Jishi Shinpō* (*The Current Affairs Newspaper*) carried a column entitled 'The Scandal of the Forged Book'. That contemporary readers believed the narrator's fabrication must have pleased Akutagawa immensely who successfully demonstrated how easy it is to create an *effet de réel*, and the writer's ability to convince the reader of anything he chooses.

A similarly roguish device had been used in 'The Wandering Jew' (1917) in order to expressly exploit the fine line between history, legend and fiction while emphasising the role of the reader in rescripting narrative. The narrator takes great delight in entertaining the reader with an extensive and evidently well-researched historical and geographical survey of the ubiquity of the legend

of the Jew who, according to legend, taunted Jesus Christ on his way to his crucifixion and was then cursed to walk the earth until the Second Coming. Rather like the chronicler historian in 'The Martytr', the antiquarian narrator in 'The Wandering Jew' mischievously mixes up supposedly real records such as the St Alban's Monastery Chronicle written by the Benedictine monk Matthew Paris with evidently fictional so-called Bunroku-era manuscripts apparently chanced upon in the Amakura Islands in Kyūshū in order to ascertain whether or not the Wandering Jew actually set foot in Japan. Serendipitously, these obscure and timely manuscripts contain direct speech from the Wandering Jew himself as he conversed with Francis Xavier on their crossing to Japan by boat. The narrator pretends to decipher the text despite its many blanks and infers from the presence of figs that the meeting took place in autumn: a classic realist device used by the historian to remind the reader that he is working with facts while also appealing to the imagination. Aware at this point that the story may be becoming far-fetched, the narrator then urges the reader to consult once more Peck's History of Stamford whose vivid description of the Jew's attire will aid the sceptical reader in reimagining the scene. Rather than appeasing the reader, by appealing to this renowned history at the most precarious moment in the (hi)story, the narrator merely leads the reader to question the authority of Peck's History which is made to appear absurd. In this way the narrator playfully demonstrates just how easy it is to bamboozle the reader who is conscripted to co-create reality imaginatively. It is by creating an *effet de réel* through real and plausible-sounding sources and then colliding them with obviously fictitious but plausible-sounding evidence, that the narrator recreates the historian effect just as he uncovers it as a hoax.

So it was three years later in ‘The Ball’ that Akutagawa altered the ending precisely because he wanted the reader to question the veracity of what he was reading and possibly, by extension, of Loti’s work too. Judging by contemporary criticism, we might question whether he had in fact been too oblique. In dwelling on the romantic nature of Akutagawa’s story and, importantly, on the status of Akiko as ignorant or pure-hearted, modern, enlightened or superficially educated in western ways, contemporary critics thus unquestioningly embraced one of the very notions that Akutagawa wished to parody in his text: that the cultural progressiveness or otherwise of a nation is extrapolated from the observed behaviour of women as narrated in a nation’s literature. The irony that underlies the ambiguous performance of modernity in Akiko highlights the rhetorical device by which female literary protagonists are routinely made to embody the culture of the nation:

> … indeed Akiko’s appearance that night, endowed as it was with all the young, feminine beauty of the new, civilised Japan was such that it caused the long-pigtailed Chinese dignitary to look at her in utter astonishment. (p.249)

That critics continue to debate Akiko’s moral status and thereby try to gauge the advancement or otherwise of Japanese civilisation is testimony to the strength of this rhetorical device. Ironically, one of the reasons Loti eventually fell from favour following his death was because French critics became aware of his fictive dissimulation (White 2004, p.69): they began to detect the dislocation between Loti and Viaud that Akutagawa had pointed out in ‘The Ball’.

Even this cursory glance at the narrative structure of the text forcefully demonstrates that Akutagawa's narrative style is central to the author's construction of meaning and skilfully uses an apparently realist, mimetic mode in order to create an ironically unstable text. As in many other works, Akutagawa draws attention to the mechanics of narration as a means to stress the ways in which seemingly "realist" texts come to have meaning even as they disguise the narrative devices which animate them. Narration is fundamentally problematised in 'The Ball' to highlight the epistemological contradictions that exist in modern national narratives.

Parodying Parodies: A Puppet-Show of Stereotypes

Akutagawa's skilful narrative playfulness may be seen not only in the text's multilayered narrative framework but also in his interpolation of stereotype, parody and performance to reveal the constructedness of texts. The very act of rewriting a recognisable text, of parodying what was essentially already a parody is an obvious disruption of a monologic will to knowledge. Such dialogisation is destabilising because it has the effect of relativising and thereby deprivileging an idea, culture or discourse. (Webb 2008, p.19). National ideas are resistant to dialogisation but this is precisely what Akutagawa sets out to dispute in 'The Ball' which is the story of the collision of national cultural ideals. We shall see how this notion of absolute invulnerability can be questioned in our final chapter 'The Man from the West' in which the testaments from the Bible,

the incarnation of authoritative, absolute discourse, are rewritten and radically undermined.

Since the characters in 'The Ball' are merely embodied clichés who seem to hover between historical fact and literary cliché, their meeting and confrontation allow for a powerful dialogisation of cultural stereotypes. Furthermore, by reinscribing specifically national stereotypes, Akutagawa is also making a pertinent point about cross-cultural projections, (mis-) understanding and representational impasses that continued to dog the Taishō quest for national identity. A survey of Akutagawa's characterisation in 'The Ball' will reveal how his exposition calls into question accepted literary modes. Secondly, an examination of the interaction of characters points to the solipsistic nature of cross-cultural understanding whether in the Taishō era or more generally.

Akiko is of course already familiar to the reader from her depiction in Loti's 'A Ball in Edo':

> The most charming of my dancers was a tiny person in faded rose with pompadour bouquets – fifteen years old at most – 'the daughter of one of our most brilliant engineering officers' – (a Miss Miogonitchi or Karakamoko, I don't remember which) (1889, p.96).

However, Akutagawa's exposition of Akiko is also like that of any number of nineteenth-century European novelists: Flaubert's Emma Bovary, say, or Tolstoy's Kitty[76]. This common débutante-at-the-ball motif is typically employed

[76] Central female characters in *Madame Bovary* and *Anna Karenina*.

as a device for romantic adventure and ultimately, disappointment. From the very first sentence, Akutagawa makes clear his intention to use this emplotment, calling not only on the reader's already clearly-defined image of Akiko but also of the generic European ball scene to foreclose the story from the outset and deny it any ending other than parting and loss.

When we read that Akiko had long been educated in French language and ballroom dancing (p.248) and that she is dressed demurely in a rose-coloured ball gown with a stylish light-blue ribbon around her neck and a fragrant single rose in her hair (p.249) we have all our preconceptions confirmed. Presented as correctly as any self-respecting nineteenth-century European débutante, Akiko is praised for her appearance by an indiscriminate group of young ladies who "all chirped like little birds" (p.250). After they have played out the encouraging and mindless role that defines them, these young women play no further part in the plot. In them, what was an orientalised vision in Loti's text becomes a universalised cliché in Akutagawa's, that of the excitable-chattering-young-girls-in-attendance.

When he allies the stereotypically beautiful and cultured Akiko with a feminised and civilised Japan, Akutagawa nods not only to the underlying ideological premise of the Lotian vision but also to the Meiji state's self-imagining as a new nation whose slogan was "civilisation and enlightenment": *bunmei kaika*. Akutagawa had explored the self-identification of Japan as a civilised nation in works such as 'An Enlightenment Husband' and 'An Enlightenment Murder'. In the former, Miura appears almost as the male version of Akiko, so utterly steeped is he in the civilisational idealism of the Meiji age. However, while the work might be seen in some ways to present a poignant

nostalgia for this apparently civilised age, the narrator is careful to demonstrate how this seemingly exemplary civilisation is in fact fabricated not only after the event by Taishō dreamers such as himself as narrator, yearning for a simpler time but also by the Meiji actors themselves. The frame story is apt as it literally frames a series of images and stereotypes in which the subjects happily participate, even when they know them to be fabrications. When Miura meets his future wife for the first time for instance, their meeting is staged and picturesque – he in his tailor-made Parisian suit, she the graceful incarnation of classical elegance, gazing at each other in wonder beside a stone temple on which is inscribed a famous verse by Bashō. Later, Miura would replace his portrait of Napoléon with that of his wife, literally replacing one *idée reçue* with another. Miura's extreme idealism stems precisely from his intellectual seclusion and his indulgence in reading and rêverie. He yearns for a romantic alterity precisely because his reality is actually completely unlike that which he desires. He is in fact in some way an agent of the Japanese empire, travelling twice on business in the story to Korea for an unexplained objective. In his intellectual demeanour and private comportment he may have been the exemplary modern enlightened gentleman, but the narrator cannot help pointing out that this act was necessary precisely because it was in fact at odds with the materialism and individualism which actually characterised his age.

The moral of the tale is to learn to resign oneself to a world which does not conform to one's ideals, something that Miura latterly learned through his own misfortune. Akutagawa admitted as much in 'A Dwarf's Words' in the passage 'Sekenchi' ('Worldly Wisdom'):

> The secret to worldly success is to live without contradicting social convention while scorning social convention. (ARZ13:96)

The idealised woman is a romantic fabrication – a romanticised vision to compensate for what she actually is. Their chance meeting, it turns out, may well have been engineered by Miura's future father in law, an antiquarian who literally sells him an exotic and much prized commodity: "amour". The narrator goes on to explain that his wife later becomes friends with a feminist who claimed equal rights for women and was subject to perennial rumours and that she may also have been having an affair with a man in a garish striped suit: the epitome of Meiji consumption and a base desire to get on. Miura's romantic deception extends to a disenchantment with his idea of Europe as a whole and of French civilisation in particular:

> "Well I must say that recently I have grown quite weary of all that is called modern enlightenment. I find civilisation quite distasteful." (ARZ4:196)

Now he hears only the sneers of Mérimée rather than the cultivated salute of Napoléon but ironically he continues to live his life through images rather than relying on first-hand experience.

Women and Meiji Civilisation

Akutagawa had used Akiko as a symbol before in 'An Enlightenment Murder' in which she is, just as in 'The Ball', the image of a young, civilised Japan for which the narrator is nostalgic. In 'The Ball' Akiko's appearance was endowed: "with all the young feminine beauty of the new, civilised Japan" (p.249) and she dazzled the Chinese guests who were uncouth by comparison. Akiko's name 明子 even incorporates the character common to Meiji: 明治 as well as civilisation: 文明 so that she becomes a literal sign of Meiji progress. Whether Akutagawa's Akiko was actually more fluent in French than Loti's version or whether she managed to dance more naturally and with more feeling is not a symptom of Japan's actual progress since Meiji but a recognition in 1920 of the Meiji state's attempt to signify itself as civilised through the appropriation of "culture" and to circumvent the negative associations of Japanese militarism.

We have already noted that women played a crucial role in the cultural imaginary of Meiji modernisation. Norman Bryson in *Westernizing Bodies* argues cogently that the westernisation of Japanese women's dress, style and comportment acted as a performance, even an embodiment of the Meiji desire to transform itself (2003, pp.98–101). The circulation of westernised Japanese women was a fantasmatic and aestheticised transposition of the colonial project and that Akutagawa set his story at the Rokumeikan surely emphasises the essentially gendered performativity, the masquerade that he recognised was at the heart of this process. This feminised national stereotyping is given a barbed edge when its concomitant hierarchy of desire is expanded in the threatening inclusion of ladies of other nationalities. Just as Akiko senses what she

imagines to be the French naval officer's appreciative fetishising of her hands, hair and neck, she becomes aware of two "German-looking women" (p.253). Whether they are German or not is of course not confirmed by the narrator but the important point is that they look German to Akiko and are therefore a threat in her conception of the League of Nations hierarchy of attraction and desirability. Akiko's perception of these European women is mediated through a specifically literary filter as they almost become the personification of Dumas fils' exotic courtesan, a kind of European *Kiku-san* (*Madame Chrysamthème*) embodied by *La dame aux camélias*: "scarlet camellias pinned to the chest of their black velvet gowns" (p.253)[77]. Akiko's anxiety is clear: her pretence at European sophistication is here confronted by its *real* counterpart and she makes the opposition clear when she states:

> "Western women really are most beautiful." (p.253)

The ball therefore becomes a kind of erotic market-place in which Akiko has to maintain her value in the face of other European ladies who are equally commodified. When the naval officer replies that Japanese women are also beautiful, Akiko will not believe him because in her eyes they may only be beautiful if they are successfully performing a Madame Chrysanthème role. The reader is left to feel that her vague anxiety and unexplained sadness stem from her lack of self-knowledge and persistence in playacting the spectacle of a cultured modernity mirroring the Meiji / Taishō quest for self-identity.

[77] Ironically in *La dame aux camélias* it was the pinning of a red camellia to the chest which indicated that Marguerite's consumption precluded love making while the wearing of a white camellia indicated her availability.

The Lure of Paris

Yet Akutagawa does more than merely stress a stereotypically feminised, Lotian embodiment of culture. Importantly, he takes the Lotian feminisation of Japanese culture and reveals how the Japanese themselves consciously superimposed and attempted (ultimately unsuccessfully) to internalise a specifically French identification. By attempting to associate itself with that universally accepted symbol of civilisation that was France, Akutagawa demonstrates how the Meiji (and later the Taishō) state could designate itself as a nation of culture. The notion of France and of Paris in particular, had long fascinated Japanese artists and many writers looked to France for inspiration. Many of Akutagawa's contemporary writers took it upon themselves to translate French literary works as a rite of cultural passage and indeed Akutagawa himself while still a university student translated and published Anatole France's 1889 work *Balthasar* in 1914. The Francophile writer Kafū Nagai (1879–1959) for instance travelled to Lyon and Paris, publishing *Furansu Monogatari* (*French Stories*) in 1907. According to Seidensticker, Kafū's delight with French culture was "essentially bookish" and was punctuated by eulogies to the likes of Maupassant and Berlioz (1965, p.28). Indeed in *Tasogare no Chichūkai* (*Twilight on the Mediterranean*), Kafū apparently stands on deck in the gathering darkness and contemplates his reluctant homeward departure, the delights of the country he is leaving and the defects of the country to which he grudgingly returns:

> I was leaving behind the love and the art of France, and I was going to a remote edge of the East, where death would presently bring an end to a dull, monotonous life. (p.29)

Kafū was an apostle of French culture, just as Shimazaki Tōson and Yokomitsu sought a cultural affinity with France as a fellow *bunmeikoku* (nation of culture). Tōson believed that the only way to penetrate another culture was through its arts and that the most developed artistic culture emanated from Paris as he noted in his *Paris Dayori* (Paris Diary):

> Paris is the capital of the arts, the fountainhead of culture, the centre of fashion and the hub of elegant behaviour. (quoted in Rimer 1988, p.8)

In 'The Ball', Akutagawa thematises the Meiji / Taishō valorisation of French culture through Akiko's identification with a very mediated notion of Paris. Her attempt to act out her idea of Frenchness is a metaphor for the Japanese state's quest to internalise the French aesthetic hierarchy and thereby redeem itself from the tawdry degraded mass cultural depictions of the "japoniaseries" that had haunted Loti's depictions[78]. Ironically, Viaud / Loti's jaded performance as elegant Frenchman reveals how even the French tired of their role.

[78] *japoniaiserie* is a play on words based on *japonaiserie*, popular in the 1880s which described the vogue for Japanese objects. It combines the word *Japon* and la *niaiserie* which means foolishness. In a similar fashion, the word *chinoiserie* had been used to designate items in vogue after the Chinese taste yet was also used by the likes of Balzac to describe not only those bibelots central to bourgeois décor but also more figuratively to denote slyness and nonsense.

In ‘The Death of Pierre Loti’ we saw how Akutagawa was all too aware of the extent to which the identification of Paris as a desirable sign of culture enchanted Japanese readers (ARZ10:88). Yet in his stereotypical characterisation of Akiko as the universal *débutante* with romantic yearnings, he brings to the fore the importance of the mediated imagination, of representation replacing the actual. “Paris” was an idea taking shape in the European literary imagination as much as it was in the Japanese. Farrant for instance has demonstrated that travel writing about France existed equally strongly as a domestic phenomenon within France in the nineteenth century as it did overseas (2007, pp.169–72). French literary representations played out often ambivalent binaries between Paris as the metropolitan centre of culture on the one hand and as a place of corruption on the other; and of the provinces as a backward rural world in slump or as idylls of rural preindustrial purity. We might indeed speculate that his vision of France as the metropolitan centre of culture and progress was what secured Loti’s election to the *Académie Française* and his short-lived elevation to the status of national writer at the expense of Émile Zola whose depictions of the underbelly of Paris and the provinces, not to mention his steadfast defence of Dreyfus, were at odds with the official history as it was being formulated in the Belle Époque.

If the literary love affair with Paris emanated from its aesthetic and aestheticised representation then Akutagawa animates this contemporary truth through Akiko’s romantic imagining of Parisian balls which might stem as much from the imagination of a fictional Emma Bovary as from any historical actuality. In its conscious presentation of Akiko’s projected world ‘The Ball’ becomes a *mise en abyme* of the imaginative power of literary representations, a pertinent

feature of French as well as Meiji and Taishō self-imaginings. 'The Ball' combines the universal cliché of the ball as a specular sexual market-place but also the sexualised orientalist topos that Loti's readers had come to expect: the strong French officer who desires the beautiful young Japanese woman who is in turn searching for a suitor. From the outset, we know how this story will develop because it is the hackneyed story of countless romantic tales and indeed the formula for all of Loti's stories: beautiful, innocent girl with sentimental ideas meets worldly-wise suave officer-type for a romantic encounter which is abruptly curtailed at midnight or with the departure of the officer who is called back to "real" life, whichever is the sooner.

Just as Akiko is a pastiche of European and *japoniste* stock characters, so is the French commissioned naval officer. The implication that the clichéd officer might actually be the writer Loti is a clever metafictional wink to the punitive constriction of the narrative mould: the writer trapped by his own imagining. If the nineteenth-century ball scene required a fresh young rose ripe for plucking then it also had to have its uniformed officer. Akutagawa's version is a universal type:

> … an unknown French commissioned naval officer [who]
> quietly approached from nowhere. (p.250)

Succinctly, we have all the metonymical parts that give him meaning. As a Frenchman, his nationality automatically endows him with stereotypical sophistication; as an unknown and indeed unnamed naval officer who quietly approaches from nowhere his identity remains mysterious but foreshadows his inevitable departure. Just as Akiko is the stereotypical locus for universal male

desire, so the unnamed French naval officer is a clichéd object of female fantasy: a site in which to indulge sexual fancy while his eventual departure assures its impermanence and inevitable return to normality. The ambivalence surrounding Loti's intrusion into Akutagawa's text points to an uneasy sense of the prostitution of the artist – by Loti and, by implication, by Akutagawa. This trope of the prostituted artist is of course itself the quintessential cliché of French romanticism so Akutagawa's *mise en abyme* of a jaded writer acting out a hackneyed narrative iteration by a writer who may be equally jaded is the height of irony. Just as Akiko's identity is fixed by the parameters of her stereotype, so there is no possibility of the French naval officer / author acting outside the boundaries of his role. True to form he is tall, tanned, with sharp features and a bushy moustache. Suave and charming, his destiny is to whisper occasional fine French compliments in Akiko's ear. As they dance, the stereotype achieves its full imprint: she is too doll-like and inexperienced to move freely and requires him to manoeuvre her adroitly so that they may both perform their assigned roles.

This theatrical motif, again common to Loti's text as well as the European novelists' generic ball scenes is certainly dramatised in Akutagawa's version to stress performativity of role[79]. Neither Akiko nor the French commissioned naval officer is narrated outside the boundaries of their stereotype. Already fixed by the genre of the story, their actions are repetitive and stylised. He asks her to dance, she responds with a bashful smile and the surging crowd which came

[79] Here we are indebted to Judith Butler who defines "performativity" as a social action which creates or consolidates identity. Both the result of a particular identity and constitutive of it, performativity is closely related to Althusserian notions of interpellation. See Butler 1990, *Gender Trouble* and Louis Althusser 1970, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays.*

"seething forth like *champagne"*[80] (p.251) carries them powerlessly towards their destiny rather like Tolstoy's implacable mechanical timepiece governing history in *War and Peace*, which, according to Miyasaka was a central source for Akutagawa's text (p.485).

Yet amid the stereotypical performances and novelistic borrowings, Akutagawa draws attention to the performativity of roles to undermine the concept of essentialised identity and reveal the constructed nature of gender and cultural identity. A key motif in the text is that of spectacle which allows the reader to witness, as it unfurls, the performance and perception of selfhood as it is negotiated between the spectator and the actor. The narrator as invisible intercessor is parodied from the start when a realist description of Akiko's entrance to the ball up the wide staircase flanked by chrysanthemums, an obvious wink to Loti's text, is followed by the hilariously melodramatic description of the music:

> From the ballroom at the top of the stairs, which stood at the end of this chrysanthemum fence, the sound of cheerful orchestral music came flooding forth like a sigh of uncontrollable happiness. (p.248)

What is then narrated of Akiko's feelings is of course mediated by this same narrator. This is important because it is not the intimate first-person narrative mode employed by Loti. Rather, it is a narration at two removes: the narrator tells us what Akiko thought she understood, but hilariously, much of the importance of what happens passes her by. In this way, Akiko becomes a comic

[80] "Champagne" appears in the text in katakana, thereby magnifying its exotic charm.

figure who lacks self-awareness, a point which is fully developed in the second chapter when she denies the “true” identity of the French naval officer.

The Triumph of Stereotype and the Solipsistic Circumvention of Reality

Akutagawa’s story is in both form and content a laying-bare of the ideological power behind all gendered, cultural and national (self-) stereotypes. Furthermore, in the interaction of its characters it also reveals that when the stereotype bypasses the original, cross-cultural understanding remains absurdly trapped within a kind of narcissistic solipsism. Akiko and the naval officer talk at crossed purposes and continue to construct the other and themselves according to the *idées reçues* which they are unable to abandon. The effect is at once comic and poignantly tragic and can best be shown when the clichéd couple are made to gaze at the fireworks from the stereotypically romantic balcony as they exchange platitudes and share a quiet moment of mutual misunderstanding. The narrator subtly notes Akiko’s perplexity at the naval officer’s silent gaze as it is fixed on the starry night sky: “It appeared to her that he was sensing a kind of nostalgia” (p.255). She wonders whether he is homesick to which he replies: “See if you can guess what I am thinking” (p.255). He remains utterly inscrutable and she is at this moment destined never to understand his inner thoughts. The scene does not end here but “for some reason”, unknown to Akiko, she felt great sadness when watching the beautiful fireworks, a stereotype of the Japanese notion of pathos at the transience of things, *mono no aware*. The naval officer concludes this scene by verbalising

that very cliché: “Those fireworks are like our *vie*” (p.256). Akiko appears to be almost tragically trapped within the stereotype that defines her and is destined never to have self-knowledge or understanding of the others around her. This theme is of course brought to its fullest tragicomic conclusion in the second chapter in which even several years later she is still utterly unaware of the “real” identity of the naval officer and therefore the “meaning” of the story.

Akiko’s solipsism stems from her understanding the naval officer through the filter of stereotype, her projection onto him of the cultural ideals she cannot distinguish from reality and a narcissistic attempt to try to embody the stereotype she imagines he has of her. In this way the overarching metaphor of the ball is a pertinent one as it encapsulates the idea of performance, spectacle and theatricality which has wider implications for social, national and indeed transnational performativity to which we alluded earlier when we noted the Meiji state’s desire to embody and perform modern culture in its young *débutantes*. The narcissism inherent in self-projection is made abundantly clear in the text’s focus on role play and in the Lacanian gaze, that is to say the anxious state of mind that comes with the self-awareness that one can be seen and looked at and the loss of autonomy that the person subjected to the gaze experiences upon becoming aware that he or she is a visible object. Elaborate play is made with looking, especially, as we have seen, when recounting Akiko’s perception of reality. She exists and her identity is formed in the gaze of others and we, the reader, watch this anxious interaction. An illustration of this method may be seen in the narrator’s account of Akiko’s watching the Count as he watches her, of the father’s satisfied air as he perceives this interaction and of the narrator’s

approbation of Akiko's interpretation of the Countess's character as understood through her face:

> Akiko did not fail to notice that when the count saw her, even his crafty face assumed, in an instant, an air of childlike wonder. With a floating happy smile, the good-natured father introduced his daughter briefly to the count and his wife. Akiko first tasted feelings of shyness then triumph. Yet in that short moment, she had the wit to see the hint of vulgarity in the face of the count's wife. (p.249)

Of course Akiko is most anxious to please the French naval officer and to this end she tries to embody the Lotian stereotype she imagines he desires. In Althusserian terms, Akiko has been interpellated to perform her role and it is no small irony that it is precisely her successful performance which bores the naval officer / Loti who hailed her to it. The stress on Akiko's solipsistic interpretation of actions is made particularly clear through her construction of the French naval officer whose innermost thoughts remain poignantly opaque. Her imagination is corroborated neither by the narrator nor by the naval officer:

> Even during that moment Akiko knew that her partner, the French commissioned naval officer was paying attention to her every movement. This revealed how much this foreigner, unfamiliar as he was with Japanese customs, was so completely captivated by Akiko's lively dancing. Did such a beautiful young woman live like a doll in a house made of paper and bamboo? Did she eat grains of rice with slender metal chopsticks from a rice bowl decorated with pale blue

> flowers held in the palm of her hand? She could tell that such questions would come and go in his gaze as he heard her tiny charming laugh. This not only amused Akiko but made her proud. (p.251)

Just as Akutagawa acknowledges in 'The Death of Pierre Loti' the eagerness of young Japanese women to emulate *Madame Prune* or *Madame Chrysanthème* as they visit their idea of Paris, so here he signals how strongly the Lotian stereotype has been internalised and embraced. Whether the French naval officer actually finds Akiko attractive because of her successful performance of the Loti stereotype is never explained. Indeed, when he reveals his own fantasy that she might look like a princess in a Watteau painting, the image is completely lost on Akiko as we are told bluntly:

> Akiko did not know who Watteau was. So the commissioned naval officer's remarks, his visions of beautiful bygone days, of wilting roses, the traces of beautiful fountains in shady forests were all shattered in an instant. (p.254)

The bathos is striking and this scene encapsulates the aestheticisation of self and others in fetishised desire as well as the inevitable non-communication which occurs when people refuse to abandon their artificial perceptions. Both protagonists, purposely *national* stereotypes mediate the other through their literary or artistic ideals in microcosm of the way in which nations imagine themselves and others. It also calls in question the effective transmission and understanding of authorial intention by a reader / partner who is blithely

unaware of what is attempting to be communicated. In short this is a story of non-communication.

While the French naval officer remains ultimately inscrutable to Akiko who persists in her romanticised imagining of him, he hints at an ironic understanding of the power of cliché in engendering desire as well as a weariness at its necessary performance. When she imagines a Parisian ball, he knows that the magic exists only in the imagination: "'It's not only Paris. Balls are the same everywhere,' he added, half to himself." (p.254) Similarly, when he challenges Akiko to guess what he is thinking, he knows that he will have to act out the romantic role expected of him when he concludes: "I'm thinking about the fireworks. Those fireworks are like our *vie*" (p.256). In this way Akutagawa may be alluding to the weariness of Viaud himself who had to churn out his formulaic stories of cross-cultural romance because that was what his audience expected of him and who indeed devised an orientalist persona, Loti, through whom he could do so. Indeed we saw in 'The Death of Pierre Loti' how Akutagawa did not berate Loti for his orientalist depictions but rather how he came to distinguish between the reality of Viaud and the Loti persona Viaud had assumed. He recognised the orientalising intention but also acknowledges that the Japanese embraced his vision as much as the French. Kawakami sees in Loti a prostituted writer, pointing out his obligation to meet the sexual stereotypes demanded by his reading public. In a letter written to a friend while writing *Madame Chrysanthème*, Loti is purported to have complained:

> Doing an enormous amount of work, writing a Japanese novel, have to submit in August: huge amount of money. The novel

> will be stupid, I'm becoming so myself. (quoted in Kawakami 2002, p.285)

In his problematising of the Viaud / Loti identity in the story, Akutagawa makes an allusion to Loti's selling of himself as much to the Parisian as to the Japanese reader as personified in Akiko. Akutagawa returns several times to this Romantic theme of the prostituted author. In the passage 'Aru shihonka no ronri' ('A Certain Capitalist's Logic') in 'A Dwarf's Words' for instance he writes that "selling an artist's work is not really any different to selling the packaging on my tin of crab meat." (ARZ13:69) In the next passage, 'Hihyōgaku' ('Critical Scholarship'), what counts is the value set by the masses since they drive the market, an idea to which we shall return at length in our chapter on 'Horse Legs':

> What one age's masses love has to be classified as standard. For example today's masses do not love Japanese-style flowers. They think that Japanese-style flowers are bad. Or today's masses love Brazilian coffee so they think it is good. The artistic value of a certain work has to be seen in the same way. (ARZ13:71)

Conclusions: The Deliberate Blurring of Fictional and National Narratives

Realist texts often occlude their polemical underpinnings since reality is made to seem self-evident rather than curated. In 'The Ball', Akutagawa unveils precisely those insidious mimetic shōsetsu-style processes that were otherwise ignored or went unquestioned. He did not look to "wrest control of the historical voice" (Rosenfeld 2000, p.54) by reassigning negative stereotypes as positive but rather he attempted to demonstrate the very mechanics of Japanese subjectification through a discourse of cliché and an at times comically misunderstood repertoire of shared national cultural imaginings. Stereotypes reflect expectations and beliefs about the characteristics of members of groups perceived as different from one's own. In the case of 'A Ball in Edo' and 'The Ball', those stereotypes are gendered and national and what is subtle in Akutagawa's treatment is not his unpicking of stereotype and a reading of it as an act of violation but rather as an act of volition. In short the subject/object of stereotype is as willing to connive in its fabrication and dissemination as its spectator. In this performative understanding of identity, imitation is at the root of stereotype and is evidently much more powerful in an age of mass communication and reproduction. One's own identity cannot but be mediated through those representational practices which define the modern age. If we are constantly imitating an image then the notion of "original self" simply disappears.

Akutagawa returned often to the centrality of stereotype, imitation and representation in shaping his view of how we apprehend the world, whether in 'A Dwarf's Words', 'Subjective Portraits' or indeed in other fictional works such as 'Green Onions' and 'An Enlightenment Husband'. In 'Literary, all too Literary'

(1927) Akutagawa once again defends Japanese culture and indeed himself against charges of imitation, “I who am so easily influenced by everything”. He held that every civilisation cannot but be based on imitation: imitation of others and, perhaps more importantly, of the idea of itself. By this rationale all imitation is necessarily inward-looking and solipsistic (ARZ9:39–41 discussed in Lippit 2002, p.68). In ‘Subjective Portraits’ Akutagawa notes that the Japanese are often seen to “excel in imitation” (ARZ 11: 189), a criticism which would appear to seal their poor reputation as shoddy manufacturers and derivative artists, always one step behind the West. Yet he goes on to explain that in order to copy one has to understand the object profoundly:

> People understand deeply or shallowly. Shallow understanding is monkey mimicry. If a very good monkey has a deep understanding of human actions, he will never mimic. (ARZ11:190)

The global politics of cultural hierarchy and international imitation are certainly problematised in ‘The Ball’. If we wonder who exactly is imitating who in this story then we will perhaps be sobered to find that rather than submitting to a facile and much rehearsed cultural hierarchy, all personae – including the narrator – are imitating representations of themselves created as much by themselves as by any perceived other.

Akutagawa was heavily influenced by Oscar Wilde and Anatole France in his understanding of life imitating art. He recalls this idea explicitly in ‘Subjective Portraits’ when he wonders whether Kunikado Doppo’s *An Honest Person* can be seen as an imitation of a work by Guy de Maupassant or whether there was

a more subtle union between them.[81] He dismisses the question as absurd because in his eyes, "calling this an imitation is like saying Napoleon imitated Alexander" (ARZ11:193). When Akutagawa paraphrases Wilde in his admission that we perceive the world and ourselves aesthetically, he sets out the principle of 'The Ball' as indeed the rest of his œuvre. Akutagawa notes in 'Subjective Portraits' that the "Ginza Girl" - a modern Japanese stereotype, an updated version of Madame Chrysanthème - is perhaps an extremely inferior three-colour version of a generic work by Renoir but it is one in which the subject (object?) happily takes part (ARZ11:194). Here Akutagawa is clearly gesturing towards the commercialisation of art and its place in mass culture, a question to which we will return at length in chapters four and five. Suffice it to note here that he was very aware of the position of the artist in the wider cultural economy alluding for instance in 'Subjective Portraits' to those: "manufacturers of modern legends whom we more commonly call artists" (ARZ11:199).

Akutagawa makes clear his sceptical position on the increasing enthusiasm for objectivity and rationalism and its claim to referential truth in the entry 'Kanshō' ('Appreciation of Art') in 'A Dwarf's Words'), in which he draws explicitly on both Wilde's *Intentions* (1891) and France's *La vie littéraire* (1888-92) [82]. In distinctly Wildean voice, he notes that the appreciation of art is an act of collaboration between the artist and the aesthete. Akutagawa embraced Wilde and France's sense of extreme subjectivism and made it the basis of his own critical and aesthetic outlook. France's notion that a book has as many

[81] Kunikado Doppo (1871–1908) was a writer of Romantic poetry and later Naturalist fiction. Guy de Maupassant (1850–93) was a Naturalist writer of short stories and novels.

[82] In his preface to *La vie littéraire* (1888–92), France described his view of the unsubstantiability of aesthetics which had much in common with Oscar Wilde's approach outlined in both *The Critic as Artist* and *The Decay of Lying* (1891).

different editions as it has readers mirrored Wilde's emphasis on the writerly position of the reader. Such a stance may be seen throughout Akutagawa's work and especially in 'The Ball' in which each character creates her own reality sometimes quite at odds with that of the actors who surround her. Wilde held that not only did different people see art differently but crucially that works of art have no independent existence of the individual who creates or perceives them (Pascual Aransáez 2001, p.300). Akutagawa admitted as much in 'Hana' ('A Nose') in 'A Dwarf's Words':

> Yet rarely do we see lovers as they actually are. Self-deception is integral to lovemaking. Anthony could not escape this – he made of the defect of Cleopatra's nose a strength. […] Amidst the delicate aroma, the gems gleaming in the head dress, toying with the lotus flower, how many people noticed the wonky nose? […] Our self-deception controls world history and has an eternal force. Two thousand years of world history do not depend on Cleopatra's insignificant nose but rather on how stupid we are. (ARZ13:28–29)

As an ontology, this is a radical act of solipsistic introspection at odds with a kind of realism that professes to make sense of the world communally. Wilde famously dismissed what he saw as the boorish "prison-house of realism" (1986, p.72) as the tedious and impossible quest to reflect life, writing in *The Decay of Lying* that: "Facts are usurping the domain of Fancy. […] They are vulgarising mankind" (p.71). Realism as a method, was, according to Wilde, a complete failure (p.69) not only because it is dull but also because it claims an ontological authority which is simply unfounded. Both Wilde and France were writing in opposition to Naturalism both as an aesthetic movement but also as

an epistemology and it is striking that these are two writers to whom Akutagawa often returns. Akutagawa shared their disdain of Naturalism not only as an artistic movement but also ideologically, in his suspicion of the will to knowledge that the epistemology represented.

We have seen in 'The Ball' how Akutagawa's radically introverted ontology interacts with the forceful internalisation of stereotype to create a reality which is at once calqued and utterly untranslatable. Stereotype, the mechanical mass reproduction of an image which may or may not be the "original" is the very paradigm of reality in Akutagawa's story. Communication is necessarily inauthentic not only because it takes place between pastiche actors but because those actors are unable to perceive the world outwith their solipsistic vision. Furthermore, Akutagawa's story shows us that this (mis/non)communication not only takes place on a personal, individual level but is also the very basis for cross-cultural exchange in general. In the clichéd interactions between Akiko and the French naval officer, the potential outcomes of which are foreclosed by their generic boundaries, we witness the animation of a specifically modern Japanese identity formation which while seemingly cosmopolitan remains squarely fixed by its own internal logic. Confined by her own perspective on events, Akiko is less interested in what is actually happening than what she believes to be important and this disconnect is made explicit to the reader. Akiko's internalised binaries are shown to misrepresent both occident and orient to eventually bypass "original" sources in a self-referential process of legitimation. In this way Akutagawa subtly parodies the problematics of recognition that had been inherent in Loti's text and which are exaggerated in the Japanese reworking.

Loti had allegedly found Japan devoid of meaning and chose to see it as a purely aestheticised entity known from *des lieux connus* such as silk prints and porcelain images. Kandiyoti makes the very pertinent point that Roland Barthes would continue the Lotian imagination in his *Empire des Signes* of 1970 in which he also equates Japan with untranslatable nothingness and inscrutably empty signs. In his glowing preface to the 1971 edition of *Aziyadé* Barthes also refuses to interact, to allow dialogue, and hence maintains difference (Kandiyoti 1995, p.393). Akutagawa shows this very maintenance of difference by the deafness of cultural exchange between Akiko and the nameless officer.

By 1920, the Rokumeikan-style Euromania that had been parodied by Loti had certainly abated and commentators began to diverge in their approach to East-West cultural power relations. In historicising the Rokumeikan period, Akutagawa not only draws attention to the strength of the Parisian cultural ideal to the Meiji but in choosing to portray Mrs H as no more enlightened than her girlish self, he also seems to vex the notion of Taishō cultural advancement. If the Meiji had prided itself on a self-confessed regimen of civilisation and enlightenment then might the watchwords of Taishō, culturalism and cosmopolitanism, be equally fabricated? Lippit argues that the ease with which Japanese writers referred to and adopted western artistic practices in the late 1910s and 1920s suggests a confident cosmopolitanism, a weakening of the seemingly unbridgeable gap between Japan and the West that had coloured the works of the previous generation of writers such as Sōseki and Ōgai (2002, p.12). In such a view the conscious intertextuality of a work like 'The Ball' is a sign that the nation had achieved the goal of modernisation and that the Meiji sense of cultural inferiority regarding western civilisation had effectively

dissipated. Yet might we just as easily see in 'The Ball' a timely nudge to the Taishō cultural apparatus in its reminder that a recourse to "culture" to identify a nation as progressive is artificial and just as politically loaded? Equally, Akutagawa seems prescient in foreseeing the self-orientalism that would characterise the late 1920s in the right-wing move to nativism.

If the search for the unadulterated is embedded in the modernist desire for an unmediated state of affairs (authentic, primitive, automatic) then Akutagawa is astonishingly post-modern in seeking to lay bare the mediated nature of cultural norms. In so doing, he foreshadows the late 1920s and 1930s' will to "overcome the modern" and return to a notionally pure Japanese aesthetic spirit before it had been contaminated by its flirtation with westernisation. The wish to escape modernity is also an unavoidable index of modernity and just as artificial as the Meiji / Taishō will to present itself as a nation of culture on a par with the universally agreed paragon of civilisation, Paris. Akutagawa's was a subtly ironising view of the Meiji / Taishō ideological project that hijacked culture as a part of the ideological nation-building apparatus.

It is the text's specular focus as exemplified in the narrator's emphasis on appearance, projection and Akiko's perception which undermines the vision of an omniscient narrator and his hitherto unquestioned power to represent. Furthermore, by subtly interweaving fictional and historical narratives, the author alludes to the fabrication of contemporary national narratives which were being used to shape the national psyche. By choosing the well-known story of the parlous Rokumeikan which had been fictionalised by Loti but which was already a cliché in 1880s Japan, Akutagawa emphasises that he is rewriting a

story, rather than basing it on mimetic witness which had long been Loti's conceit. By the time Akutagawa wrote 'The Ball', we might question whether his work had become in fact a parody of the *japoniste* trend and of its hackneyed tropes of desire, sadness and loss.

Wilde had it that a great artist invents a type, and Life tries to copy it: "to reproduce it in a popular form, like an enterprising publisher" (1986 [1889], p.74). In parodying Loti he subverts the very terms of Loti's representation. 'The Ball' is essentially a copy of a copy but one which makes it plain that it is not interested in engaging with an extratextual reality, but rather admits that it is the intertextual which shapes meaning. What Akutagawa ultimately achieves in this work is not the unpacking of the meaning of stereotype, but the revelation of meaning *as* stereotype.

Said would argue that the imaginative construction of the Orient was based largely on books and Michel Butor would support him by asserting that in travel writing, books are in all cases at the origin of the voyage (Kandiyoti 1995, p.391). Extremely well-versed in Japanese, Chinese and European literatures, Akutagawa was certainly mindful of the powerful influence that books had on the imagination. Indeed Hedberg has shown how Akutagawa's own journalistic travelogue *Shina yūki* (*Travels in China*) was so heavily indebted to the Chinese literary topos that shaped his outlook that he was unable to write about the China he experienced without constant reference to it (2017, pp.242–54). Recognising the feeling of the uncanny which arose as he toured parts of the country, Akutagawa would be keenly aware of the sense of experiential and epistemological fracture that is the necessary consequence of having read the place before.

Yet Akutagawa's was more than an aesthetic appreciation, he understood the cultural and political implications which were at stake in celebrating modern national writers like Loti. Loti shaped and was indeed shaped by the expectations his books aroused in his readers. Loti was caught in a vicious representative cycle in which the more exotic his works, the more his readers demanded exoticism. As such, Loti played a significant role in the formation of a popular orientalist discourse in both France and Japan. Indeed, Kandiyoti points to William Schwartz's 1927 study of the role of the Far East in French Literature which made the audacious assertion that the potency of the Madame Chrysanthème myth was even a factor in the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War (1995, p.392).

As such Akutagawa's approach may be seen as a deconstructive strategy revealing the obfuscation implicit in the realist mode and its will to knowledge by stressing the positionality of the reader and the politicisation of the means of representation. The performance paradigm inherent in 'The Ball' reveals self-fashioning to the point of parody and the theatricality of the fictive world may be extrapolated to a social discourse in which those roles assumed to be natural and indeed immutable are revealed to be a myth. The mythopoeic is central to this story as indeed to each of the works analysed in depth in this study and this is why we have chosen to begin with 'The Ball' in an attempt to set the aesthetic and intellectual parameters for approaching the rest of Akutagawa's work. Throughout, Akutagawa reveals the extremely mediated nature of cultural relations which are revealed as fictional ontologies by undermining the authority of the mimetic mode which claims an uncontested authority to represent. This is a complex mechanism through which

consciousness itself is reproduced through social relations and identifications, not through coercion but through self-identification amid the broader network and economy of desire.

If realism is undone in 'The Ball', then in our next chapter on 'The Peach Boy' we will see how narrative form and the manipulation of collective memory shaped through shared stories can have wider epistemological implications for the nation state's will to mythologisation and national identity. The title of this next story, like that of 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab', might lead the reader to believe that she is in the domain of the harmless children's folktale but she would be mistaken. It is precisely through the appropriation of the folk tale genre and its undialogised realist voice that Akutagawa reveals the forcefulness of narrative in the modern age as well as its polemical underpinnings. This popular legend of the peach boy who slays the devils on Devil Island is made to appear as a curiously pertinent metaphor for a modern Japan which was becoming skilful in its articulation of military expansionism. The curious juxtaposition of the infantilising fairy tale voice and the infamy of modern colonialism reveals the powerful mechanics of persuasive narrative required to move the modern subject to positions of acquiescence. The powerful realist style of the fairy tale requires a suspension of belief which will brook no opposition in its timeless appeal but here, as also in 'The Man from the West', it is dialogised as myth and as such Akutagawa is persuasively iconoclastic.

Chapter Three

Momotarō: Militarism Demystified

> Men of Antiquity taught that making the people stupid was the best way of governing the country. Work either to make them as stupid as possible or, by whatever means, much wiser. ('Minshū', ('The Masses'), 'A Dwarf's Words' 1923–5 ARZ13:60)

> Japanese Pirates of the Middle Ages show that we Japanese are easily worthy of being ranked among the great powers of the world. We Japanese with our thieving, slaughter, adultery etc have never been inferior to the Spaniards, Portuguese or the Dutch in looking for the Golden Island, ('Wakō' ('Japanese Pirates of the Middle Ages)', 'A Dwarf's Words' 1923–5 ARZ13:89)

If 'The Ball' is an acknowledgement of the power of performativity and the will to romanticise the self according to shared narratives, then 'The Peach Boy'[83] is its politically barbed counterpart. Both concede that mythologisation is the means by which reality is both constructed and experienced in the mass media age. In 'The Ball' we are brought to understand that it is the inescapable medium through which we necessarily apprehend the world. In 'The Peach Boy' we observe how it can also be a call to arms and a mythopoeic short-cut to national

[83] The short length of 'The Peach Boy' allowed it to be first published as a single instalment in the *Sandei Mainichi* (*Sunday Mainichi*) supplement of the *Mainichi Shinbun* newspaper on 1st July 1924. It was then republished in December 1925 in book form as part of the collection *Shiroi budō* (*White Grapes*), edited by Tatsuno Yutaka. After this it languished in relative obscurity, only being republished as part of Akutagawa's collected writings. Finally, in 2005 it was republished in a large picture book format with Akutagawa's text accompanying illustrations by graphic artist Terakado Masayuki (Henry 2009, p.109).

identification. In this chapter we will focus on history, both as narrative and the past it invents as myth. Our use of myth will be understood in the Barthesian sense in so far as it purports to have the power to shape subjects. We will show how Akutagawa 'unravels' such discourses and narratives.

Momotarō, Parody and Folklore

> We Japanese convince ourselves that we have been loyal to the Emperor for two thousand years, filially pious towards our parents, to the Shinto god Sarutahiko. It's the same as putting on make-up – when will we stop ignoring this historical truth? (Nihon jin' ('Japanese People') in 'A Dwarf's Words', ARZ13:89)

The protagonist and title of a popular tale from Japanese folklore, Momotarō is traditionally described as coming to Earth inside a giant peach found floating down a river by an old, childless woman. The woman and her husband discover the child when they try to open the peach whereupon the child explains that he has been sent by Heaven to be their son. A grown man, Momotarō leaves his parents to fight a band of marauding *oni* (demons or ogres) on a distant island, befriending a talking dog, monkey and pheasant on his way. On the island, Momotarō and his animal friends beat the band of demons into surrendering before returning home with the demons' plundered treasure and the demon chief as a captive. Momotarō and his family live happily ever after.

Akutagawa's version of the popular tale is a satire of "the original" in which the peach boy is a cruel invader who brutally attacks a group of humanised ogres living peacefully on an island. He is motivated by greed and power and lacks the nobility expected of a legendary warrior. He abuses his animal friends and treats the surrendered ogres without compassion. At the end of the story, a group of rebellious young ogres plot to counterattack in order to win the independence of their homeland.

In its winks to the nascent Japanese empire in China and its obvious contempt for abuses of social and economic power, this latter story may be seen as a very powerful attack on Meiji and Taishō Japan in its claim to cultural modernity[84]. As always, Akutagawa's choice of form is central to the generation of meaning: the incongruously archaic folk-tale genre borrows a persuasive realist style which appears to brook no opposition in its vision of the world. It muddles the ancient force of legend with the subjective position of the modern narrator scrabbling to produce an *effet de réel* to realise a text which turns the folk tale on its head and, in turn, leads us to question the folk tale of Japanese imperial ancestry as it was being articulated at the time.

This conscious collision of the folkloric and the realist is both radical and radicalising as it brings us to understand how both narrative positions share the same fundamental illusion of truth and how this device leads us to become the

[84] For a concise and compelling précis of Japan's ambitions and interventions in China, see W. Hedberg, 2017. Joining the Allies in World War I, Japan seized German concessions in the Shandong Peninsula which it sought to confirm in the "Twenty-One Demands" of 1915 as well as an extension of economic privileges in Inner Mongolia and Manchuria and the stationing of Japanese police and advisors in Fujian province. By the 1920s Japanese civilian and military presence in China had risen to over 130000 (Hedberg 2017, p.238).

willing and uncritical participants in the fictions created for us. 'The Peach Boy' illustrates on a more global scale how public opinion is, like the soldier, conscripted to certain ideational positions and how the populace at large is brought to obey an increasingly normative national state. An extraordinarily disturbing story, it dislocates the folk tale which is designed to soothe, delight and gently transmit a plain moral message by troubling the reader to question the very precepts she holds as self-evident. As we shall see in our final chapter, this procedure is rehearsed afresh in 'The Man from the West', a similarly iconoclastic work which reveals the Christian narrative to be a fiction, albeit one which is archetypally powerful. Both 'The Peach Boy' and 'The Man from the West' share a concern with the ideological appropriation of cosmogeny and mythologising narratives at a national and therefore inescapably spiritual level. Rather than presenting them as archaic or outdated practices, both stories reveal them to be part of the ideological will to power of the modern political apparatus.

If 'The Ball' showed how the individual cannot but internalise cultural cliché then these two works go further by demonstrating how mythico-historical stereotype may shape a spiritual community and lead its members to action. Our fourth chapter on 'Horse Legs' will bring both these forces together to demonstrate the role of public opinion, shaped by the national press in policing such communities.

We will explore in this chapter how Akutagawa's choice of the legend as genre is a particularly important one to which the author returned often, be it in 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab' or 'Kachi kachi yama' ('Fire-Crackle

Mountain', 1923). In its reprisal of an ancient story, Akutagawa's 'The Peach Boy' may not, at first glance, be recognisable as a modern work. There were indeed many reiterations of the legendary tale in the Meiji and Taishō period as we shall see presently. Yet in its radical questioning of literary discourse and its position on subjectivity, authorial position and the metafictional production of an imagined community, it is indisputably modern and quite different to versions that preceded it. Karatani notes a misconception in the conflation of the western and the modern: if the theme is non-western it is perceived to be anti-modern (1993, p.192). However, it is important to note that Akutagawa chose "anti-modern" and unimpeachably nativist works like 'The Peach Boy', 'Fire-Crackle Mountain' and 'The Quarrel between the Monkey and the Crab', all of which were included in the primary school reading book the *shōgaku kokugo tokuhon* (Antoni, p.161), in order to take a polemical stance on modern society and also to question the literary and epistemological bases on which the modern national subject was being predicated.

Useful and Inspiring Fictions: Legend or History?

> **MYTHOLOGY**, *n.* The body of a primitive people's beliefs concerning its origin, early history, heroes, deities and so forth, as distinguished from the true accounts which it invents later. (Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*, 2005 [1911], p.94.

A distinctly social medium, the role of the legend is to set out a national epic past which in its absolute distance from contemporary reality cannot be gainsaid. Ostensibly anti-modern, the legend and the folk tale actually assumed a very important position in the modern literary world as we shall see in this chapter. Contemporary cultural critics observed the worrying popularity of moralising children's stories as a symptom of the means by which ideological conscription was being brought to bear in the Meiji and Taishō periods and this phenomenon was surely not lost on Akutagawa who chose it as the medium of his sharpest and most effective criticism (Rubin 1984, pp.199–207). Indeed the Committee for the Investigation of Popular Education which had been established in 1911 worked with the Committee on Literature to promote texts which were deemed to be morally improving. Affronted by this governmental interference in artistic life, Sōseki for instance refused a Doctor of Letters from the Ministry of Education and was vocal in his opposition to the Committee on Literature's promotion of moralism and fairy tales (p.207).

Such committees formed part of the move by the Meiji state which would be amplified under the Taishō regime to form a national-cultural historiographical movement to legitimate the regime and present it as the

providential apex of a national spiritual destiny. Historical and literary enquiry were in fact institutionalised under Meiji and were heavily regulated. Brownlee has detailed at length how the Meiji Constitution's investment of sovereignty in the Emperor "co-extensive with the Heavens and with the Earth", the legitimacy of which was based squarely on ancient myths "sacred and inviolable" meant that it became incumbent on the state to become a supporter of the ancient myths and to censor any dissenting ontologies (1997, p.7). Regulation of publishing was one means by which the state attempted to control ideology and disseminate an emperor-centred state cult. Censorship was common and it is of interest to note that the narratologically modern and relatively straightforward 'The General' was heavily censored while the ostensibly legendary 'The Peach Boy' was not. Clearly the message of the former story is invective but its narrative stance is uncomplicated while the latter is inflammatory in its narrative implication, denouncing the very philosophic principles on which modern Japan was founded.

In order to support the regime's will to knowledge, the Meiji state planned to resume, as an official government undertaking, the writing of history as it had apparently been practised in the Heian period and appointed official historians and salaried civil servants to create a historiography with an evident moral purpose (Brownlee 1997, pp.81–2). Professors at the Tokyo Imperial University were appointed as civil servants and could be dismissed if they did not toe the imperial line as was the case with Kume Kunitake in 1890–2 (p.92)[85]. University teaching under Meiji became distinct from scholarship and those employed by

[85] Kume Kunitake was dismissed as Professor at Tokyo Imperial University in 1892 for unacceptably sceptical writing on Shinto. His dismissal marked the beginning of a taboo on discussing the historical veracity of the Age of the Gods (Brownlee 1997, p.8).

the Imperial University had to accept, if they were to keep their jobs, that students were to be taught “useful and inspiring fictions appropriate to a sacerdotal state” (p.128).

The 1890 *Nihon bungakushi* (*History of Japanese Literature*) made clear its didactic aim in shaping a moral programme which would lead the nation to ever greater enlightenment (Brownstein 1987, p.452). The philosophy of the school system mirrored developments at university level: when Mori Arinori assumed his position as Minister for Education in 1885 to establish a newly centralised school system, he was clear that the purpose of primary and secondary education was to create obedient, loyal and productive citizens of the Japanese state. This approach was reflected in the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education – executed two years before Akutagawa’s birth – which set out the national ethic of loyalty to the Emperor and love for the nation based on the Confucian ethics of filial piety. The standardised version of *Momotarō* should be seen as the literary expression of such national ethical projects and was clearly aimed at children for early indoctrination in schools.

Nation-state Mythology

Akutagawa’s rewriting of the by now canonical tale was politically important because it parodied the move by the state to inculcate a particular national consciousness among children and treat subjects as infants. The doubting voice of the narrator dislodges the absoluteness of the epic past and travesties its sacred authority. Not only does ‘The Peach Boy’ reveal the narrative structure at work behind moral conscription in the imperial age but in its echoes of

Japanese creation myths it also ruptures the sacredness of the divine foundation of Japan as a nation state. In this bold ideological move, Akutagawa is logically brought to a position from which he may interrogate all national and spiritual ontologies which he develops in his critique of Christian mythology in 'The Man from the West'. Common to each of these texts, as we saw in 'The Ball', is the privileged position of narrative voice in its quest to instil certain national and ideological positions.

As in 'The Ball', Akutagawa is transparent in his debt to other writers in order to question the notion of originality and to indicate culture as a process of necessarily intertextual borrowing. Akutagawa radically rewrites 'The Peach Boy', a received Japanese classic well known by Japanese children and their elders at the time of its composition and he links it to the *Kojiki*, the oldest record of history in Japan (712AD) and a repository of Japanese mythology. Presented as a national history, the *Kojiki* was in fact a collection of myths clearly formulated to legitimise the rule of the imperial house (Antoni 1991, p.156). Presented in epic time by an unspecified yet privileged narrator with direct speech, the *Kojiki* sets out the divine origins of the Japanese empire in a series of simple, short chapters. It begins with the divine apparition of the deities Izanagi and Izanami and narrates the couple's conjugal intercourse and the subsequent birth of the various islands and deities of Japan. Details of the birth of the islands is at times graphic, for instance Izanami gives birth through her vomit, faeces and urine while Amaterasu, from whom the emperors of Japan are descended was, according to the *Kojiki*, borne of Izanagi's eye. (Philippi 1968, p.57) By juxtaposing the imperial cosmogeny with that of the children's

story of a peach boy, Akutagawa is able to criticise the fanciful legend on which a modern empire is founded.

Kōnoshi Takamitsu (Shirane and Suzuki 2000, pp.51–70) has detailed how Meiji imperial legitimation came about as part of the discussion in the 1890s of the proper relationship between nationhood and language[86]. In order to better articulate a coherent linguistic-cultural foundation for the modern nation state, it was deemed desirable for a vernacular corpus of Japanese classics to be constructed and the *Kojiki* became a national classic in this manœuvre. The promotion of this work was part of the ideological transformation of myth to authenticate the modern emperor system which was henceforth predicated on the single myth paradigm (p.66). By radically dialogising the *Kojiki* myth, Akutagawa effectively undermines its authoritative status as we shall see presently.

By also incorporating other classic Japanese myths such as 'Shuten Dōji' ('The Drunkard Boy') and 'Issun Bōshi' ('Little One Inch') Akutagawa deftly equalises the *Kojiki* with such legends and in the juxtaposition destroys the former's will to power. In another narrative masterstroke Akutagawa manages to identify the crab of 'The Peach Boy' as the self-same crab of the other children's classic which he hilariously and irreverently rewrote, 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab*'*. By uniting the two characters, Akutagawa creates the illusion of reality even as we know that crabs do not go around avenging themselves in real life. If anything, Akutagawa's link presents the crab as an actor progressing

[86] See for instance Ueda Kazutoshi's 1894 *Kokugo to kokka to* (*National Language and the State*) which argued that the nation state needed to be founded on a common language (Shirane and Suzuki 2000, p.64).

from one performance to the next, thereby reinforcing the realisation that the sense of reality created by the mythographer is artificial.

Elsewhere we are reminded of European satire such as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Voltaire's *Candide* and France's *L'île des pinguoins (Penguin Island*, 1908) which, by association, bring the reader to the satirical standpoint necessary to approach the tale. As ever, it is the interstices between history and myth which are fully explored in this sceptical narrative. As in the *Kojiki*, myth, legend and fairy-tale coalesce in 'The Peach Boy' yet it offers the inverse effect of satirising rather than revering the Japanese spirit.

Nation-state mythology clearly exercised Akutagawa's contemporaries and recent predecessors. A keen reader of Nietzsche who held that mythography ought to be reinvigorated in the post-Enlightenment world to disabuse it of its destructive rationalism and contribute to the revival of culture, Akutagawa recognises the political advantage in the modern recourse to mythology. In this sense he might be said to echo Ambrose Bierce whose biting commentary on the political usefulness of mythology to modern nation states was articulated in his fiendishly humorous *Devil's Dictionary* of 1911 as we saw in the quotation at the beginning of this section.

We noted in our chapter on 'The Ball' Akutagawa's following of Anatole France and we may see in 'The Peach Boy' undisguised resonances with works such as France's *Penguin Island*. Works such as this allow us to see the role of myth and legend in modern national consciousness more globally. France's story, a satirical history of a fictitious island, inhabited by great auks, is a scathing commentary on the founding myths great nations like France tell

themselves in the modern age and the links with 'The Man from the West' are obvious. Mistaking the auks for humans, a wayward Christian missionary baptises them which then poses a dilemma for God who normally only allows humans to be baptised. After consulting with saints and theologians in Heaven, He resolves the dilemma by converting the baptised birds to humans with only a few physical traces of their ornithological origin and giving them each a soul. This is the beginning of their great national history which is the subject of the story. Like 'The Peach Boy' and *Seihō no hito*, France's work throws up questions of the problems of grand metanarratives, mythologisation and romantic nationalism.

'The General': A Pendant to 'The Peach Boy'

A supremely engaged and decidedly historically situated text rather than an atemporal folk tale, 'The Peach Boy' also reveals Akutagawa's keen interest in contemporary politics and in the power struggles inherent in modern capitalist imperialism. It has rightly been viewed as a biting commentary on Japanese militarism and colonialism of the early twentieth century. Leading Akutagawa critic Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi for instance notes how the writer parodied the universally recognised tale of the boy born from a peach who journeys with his three companions the dog, the monkey and the pheasant to overcome the distant devils' island to return triumphantly with hoards of treasure to national fame to critique a disturbingly modern Japanese international situation. Renaming the eponymous hero 'Shinryakusha Momotarō' ('Momotarō the Invader'), Sekiguchi highlights Akutagawa's inversion of the tale in order to

bring to the fore the writer's view of the unnatural and barbaric nature of the colonising project (Sekiguchi 2000, p.553). In his *Momotarō Ron* (*Momotarō Discourse*,1982), Nakamura Seishi sees Akutagawa's version of the tale as a prophecy of the Nanjing Incident of 1927[87] while Kawabaro Saburo's *Fukuzawa Yukichi to Momotarō – Meiji no jidō bungaku* (*Fukuzawa Yukichi and Momotarō – Meiji Children's Literature*, 1996) sees in the tale a reflection of Japanese militarism (Sekiguchi 2000, pp.553–54).

Akutagawa's 'The Peach Boy' was certainly penned in response to recent Japanese imperial interventions as our reading of 'Subjective Portraits' will illustrate. In the Sino-Japanese War (1894–5), Japan's first foreign war in modern times, China and Japan fought over control of Korea. Japan succeeded in capturing the valuable Liaodong peninsula from China but was soon forced to return it by the "Triple Intervention" of Russia, Germany and France, which laid the groundwork for the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5. In the new pillage economy which Akutagawa shows characterises the modern age, workers' rights are rudely diminished and indentured workers are exposed as capitalist fodder in a system of ingrained privilege.

'The General' historicises a battle of the by now mythologised siege of Port Arthur in the Russo-Japanese War and reveals it to be far from the heroic spectacle it had been made out to be. By creating the "reality" of the battle as he imagines it, Akutagawa undermines the heroism of war and reveals the

[87] In March 1927 Kuomintang troops targeted and looted foreign properties, killing and injuring many foreigners. Western and Japanese warships on the river responded by shelling Chinese forces in an effort to stop the looting of the city. Presumably the backlash against Momotarō in part five of Akutagawa's version is what is in question here.

cheapness of fighting, preferring to see war as prostitution to the state. Heavily censored, 'The General' is a truly biting indictment of the Russo-Japanese War and in particular its portrait of the victorious yet monomaniac General resembling Nogi Maresuke (1849–1912), the war's hero, is a bitter satire of a man responsible for the death of thousands**.** Similarly, *Kubi ga ochita hanashi* (*The Story of a Head that Fell Off*, 1917) is told from the perspective of a Chinese soldier caught in the first struggle for Liaodong and whose hatred for the Japanese prosecuting the war is as visceral and undisguised as that for his own country and superiors, expressed here in direct speech:

> I'm the unluckiest man alive, coming to a place like this to fight and die so young, killed like a dog for nothing. I hate the Japanese who wounded me. I hate my own officer who sent me out on this reconnaissance mission. I hate the countries that started this war – Japan and China. And that's not all I hate. Anyone who had anything to do with making me a soldier is my enemy. (ARZ3:53–54)

These examples of invective against the modern Japanese international position are strengthened by the caustic entries on Japanese imperialism in 'A Dwarf's Words' which provide a framework for approaching 'The Peach Boy'. For instance, in the entry entitled 'China'[88], Akutagawa remarks on the aggression of the imperial powers towards China:

[88] The neologism 'Shina' was an often derogatory term that referred only to modern China and elided reference to the classical civilisation. (Henry 2009, p.101)

> When the firefly larva eats snails, it does not completely kill them. In order always to eat new flesh, it has the snail paralysed. At the beginning of the Japanese Empire, the attitude of the great powers towards China was like that chosen by the firefly towards the snail. The greatest tragedy of today's China is that for the sake of countless Roman ideologues, there is no single iron Mussolini. ('Shina' ('China'), ARZ13:94–95)

Sekiguchi maintains that Akutagawa's experiences as a correspondent for the *Osaka Mainichi Shinbun* (*Osaka Daily Newspaper*) in China in the closing years of the Qing Dynasty most certainly influenced his subsequent retelling of the national tale (1999, pp.415, 434; 2000, p.554). A meeting with the Chinese revolutionary Zhang Taiyan in the French district of Shanghai in 1921 apparently impressed him in particular. In the interview, later retold in *Hekiken* (1924), Zhang is purported to have said:

> The Japanese I hate most of all is the Japanese Momotarō who invaded the Devils' Island. I cannot also help but feel antipathy towards those Japanese citizens who love Momotarō. (Quoted in Sekiguchi 1999, p.415)

Three years after returning from his travels in China and apparently stimulated by the emerging proletarian movement, Akutagawa penned his version of 'The Peach Boy' which, along with the 1922 work 'The General' may be viewed, according to Sekiguchi, as an early work of proletarian literature (2000, p.554). Certainly there are very obvious allusions to abuses inherent in the capitalist economy in this and in other works. In 'The General' just as in 'The Quarrel of

the Monkey and the Crab', the ravages of modern capitalism are savagely exposed while Akutagawa's distaste for colonialism in general and Japanese militarism in particular are also unambiguously presented. Crucially these two modern phenomena are inextricably linked as expansionism is revealed to be the proper adjunct of capitalism since the quest for new markets becomes ever more urgent. The legendary and timeless loyal retainers in 'The Peach Boy' are brought up to date in a dispute over wages with their unscrupulous task master and in fact resemble the aggrievedly conscripted modern soldiers in 'The General'. In both tales, each mercenary is as powerless as the other. In 'The General', the soldiers may not refuse to do their patriotic duty and are forced to exchange their lives for the price of so-called national glory, a poor return on their part. In 'The Peach Boy' the miserly feudal lord who seeks treasure rather than glory is able to drive down wages in an unregulated market leaving the conscripts little room for manoeuvre. Having conquered Devils' Island, he then takes the children as hostages and has them drag the carriage containing spoils from their homeland. In these examples we are reminded once more of Akutagawa's remark in 'Shūshin' ('Morals') in 'A Dwarf's Words' which may be seen to encapsulate Akutagawa's understanding of the Taishō imperial social and economic model in which capital finds value above all else:

> The morality that governs us is the morality of the feudal age corrupted by capitalism. We get almost nothing from it but harm (ARZ13:30).

Akutagawa is not only concerned with the horror of war but he is elsewhere preoccupied with the position of the soldier and his stance varies

between sympathy for his exploited powerlessness and scorn for his often unthinking obedience which enables the success of an otherwise unjustifiable mission. As set out in the Meiji Constitution, the Emperor as Supreme Commander of the Army and Navy and could declare war and conclude treaties while Japanese subjects were amenable to service in the Army and Navy. As such, soldiers were in the employ of the Emperor and had to obey without question. In 'Heisotsu' ('Rank and File') for instance, the status of the soldier is explained:

> The ideal soldier must always obey unconditionally his superior's commands. To obey unconditionally is to be unconditionally uncritical. That is to say the ideal soldier must part with reason.
> *Mata* (Moreover)
> The ideal soldier must obey commands unconditionally. To obey commands unconditionally is to part with responsibility. That is to say the ideal soldier has to prefer irresponsibility. (ARZ13:87–88)

'The General' would be more sympathetic towards the soldier than the image of him presented here in 'A Dwarf's Words'. Conscripted against his will and critical of the operation into which he is forced by his social superior, the soldier is hardly the ideal, unthinking soldier presented here. Thrown together, the carpenter, paper merchant and primary school teacher are made to turn their bodies into "human cannon balls". Horio, the carpenter, is shrewd in his understanding of the hopeless and ignominious reality of the war, pointing out the lies he and his fellow conscripts have been told to make them acquiesce in

the name of “Nippon Banzai”. When the primary school teacher asserts that he believes it to be his duty to die, we are forced to recognise his position as mindless agent of the state, inculcating, as an educator, patriotism and “Japanese values” to his charges. At this juncture we are reminded of Akutagawa’s own short and unsuccessful stint as a school teacher at the Yokosuka Naval Engineering School which came to an end when he resigned in 1919 and during which time he apparently regaled students with tales of Japanese defeat rather than victory as was expected (Tsuruta 1967, p.117)[89]. Akutagawa clearly could not square his conscience with the role of patriot and moralist which was the preserve of the school teacher.

This uncritical indoctrination of subjects as children is elsewhere observed in ‘A Dwarf’s Words’ in the entry entitled (‘Shōni’) ‘Young Child’ which likens the soldier to the primary school pupil:

> The military man is like the young child. He is delighted with heroic-looking gestures, liking what is called glory. Prizing mechanical training, animal courage is nothing but a primary-school posture. Slaughter is a bit unexpected but the child will choose it. What is especially childlike is how he is made to sound the trumpet and march to the beat of a war song, joyful regardless of whatever reason he is made to fight and hit his opponent. (ARZ13:37)

[89] Apparently averse to the school protocol of using materials relating to the triumphs of war to inspire the naval students in his care, Akutagawa apparently chose only those texts relating to defeat and thereby quickly earned the nickname of ‘Loser’ (Tsuruta 1967, p.117).

If the soldier presented here is a mindless child distracted by helmet crests, leather straps and other toys then the role of the primary school in instilling pride through songs, games and stories is crucial. It is no coincidence that Akutagawa chose to write his most scathing criticism of Japanese imperialism in the form of a children's tale to mirror the way in which Japanese subjects were being brought to positions of acquiescence at an early age.

We turn our attentions now to the choice of that schoolbook text 'The Peach Boy' to explore its role in indoctrinating young Japanese just as the soldier is gaily conscripted in 'Young Child'. Crucially, we aim to demonstrate that the choice of legendary text, of narrative form and style are the basis not only of this work's polemical poignancy but also of a wider epistemological critique of the modern nation state's will to self-mythologisation. Let us begin by exploring the ways in which Akutagawa's 'The Peach Boy' parodies the mythology of the modern imperial nation state.

'The Peach Boy': Parodying a Modern Nationalist Mythology

While 'The Peach Boy' tale can locate its roots in oral tradition, it was by the late 1880s firmly entrenched in nationalist propaganda (Antoni 1991, p.163). This had been achieved through the Meiji standardisation of one version of the folk tale at the expense of other variations and its inclusion in the newly compulsory state education system in the form of primary school reading books, the *Shōgaku Kokugo Tokuhon* (National Primary School Reader), the first of which was published in 1886 (p.160). Antoni traces the importance and resurgence of

folk tales and myths to the Meiji state as it attempted to legitimate its regime and create a sense of imperial and spiritual lineage. The Meiji myths and legends of the *kokugaku* (national learning) were based on its ideology of spiritual homogeneity for urgent political imperatives (p.157). The projection of a unified Japanese folk nation was a mystical-mythical community centred on the figure of the Emperor and the notion of the extended Japanese family. The military and the school system were the institutions employed to disseminate and enact the state's ideological objectives and it is no coincidence that in Akutagawa's writings, the similarities between soldiers and children are exaggerated.

Primary education was seen to be particularly decisive in instilling in Japanese children a sense of national pride and community (p.160). We have noted how the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education sought to educate Japanese children in ethical values and moral standards (*shūshin*) and it was found that the version of 'The Peach Boy' popular since the Edo period with its expression of the classical Confucian values of loyalty, filial piety and righteousness could be harnessed to the national imperial ideal articulated through the newly invigorated national learning (*kokugaku*) (Polen 1999, p23). We must not forget that this was the regime under which Akutagawa was himself educated and he would have read such stories as 'The Peach Boy' with his classmates. While there were other versions of the story extant, as for example those written by Ozaki Koyo, Iwatani Konami, Kusuyama Masao, Eguchi Kan and Joji Tsubota the story was increasingly expurgated of aspects which did not support the new "Japanese spirit", *yamato damashii* (Sekiguchi 2000, p.553). To exemplify the timely advantage of harnessing well-known

children's stories to urgent national causes, Polen cites a 1904 version of the tale called *Meiji Momotarō* in which the devils are depicted as Russians complete with uniforms and beards (p.24). However, the edition in the primary school readers with its simple sentence structure and content became the standard version of the tale. It premised a homogeneous nation based on common origin and lauded the Japanese as a commanding race with moral superiority over the uncultivated "devils" outside its island borders (Antoni 1991, p.166). Antoni goes on to trace the later propagandist trajectory of the tale when he asserts that: "No other material from fairy-tale tradition was so subject to nationalistic interpretation and war propaganda as the story of the little 'Peach Boy'" (p.163). Akutagawa of course would live to see neither the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931 nor the "total war" beyond but he was witness to Japan's increasing pan-Asianist expansionism and aggressive presence in China. Hokkaido had been internally colonised by 1869 and the Ryūkyū Kingdom was annexed as Okinawa Prefecture in 1879, formally becoming an internal colony after the Sino-Japanese War (1894–5) (Siddle 1996, p.53). This war also forced the ailing Qing Dynasty to yield Taiwan to Japan while the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5) resulted in Korea being ceded first as a protectorate, then as an annexed territory in 1910. This latter war also ensured that Japanese influence replaced that of Russia in China which the Japanese hoped to reinforce by building the South Manchurian Railway in 1906. Japan continued to pursue opportunities to expand its position in China in the 1910s and 1920s[90] and, following the Twenty-One Demands of 1915, aggressively

[90] It is interesting that a number of Akutagawa's stories from the late 1910s and 1920s are set in Japan's (in)formal empire using Japanese commercial or

broadened its sphere of influence, much to China's displeasure. As a result of these demands, anti-Japanese Chinese nationalism reached a new height, culminating perhaps in the May Fourth Movement in 1919.[91]

The fierce resentment of the Chinese towards the Japanese apparently impressed Akutagawa when he visited China in 1921 (Sekiguchi, 1999, p.434). For instance, a visit to a school allowed him to listen to a school teacher's reports of mass rape of Chinese women by the Japanese (p.434). Solemnly affected by what he had seen, he apparently jotted down notes from conversations which he would use for his next story 'The General' in 1922 (p.434).

Namekawa Michio in *Momotarō Zō no Henyō* (*The Changing Image of Momotarō*, 1981) points out that Akutagawa was the first known writer to satirise the 'The Peach Boy' tale (Sekiguchi 2000, p.553). The reason his version is so effective is precisely because it relies on a fundamental complicity with the reader whose expectations are playfully yet sinisterly subverted at every turn. Unsettled, the reader is left to question the canonic foundation of his understanding and, by recognising the mechanics of the univocal official ideology through its epic form, comes to see the myth as dialogic text. Let us turn our attentions presently to a close reading of Akutagawa's version to probe this technique in greater depth.

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diplomatic influence as their backdrop. See for instance 'Horse Legs' and 'An Enlightenment Husband'.

[91] For a detailed treatment of the Chinese response to Japanese aggression under Taishō, see Luo, Zhitian 1993. 'National Humiliation and National Assertion: The Chinese Response to the Twenty-One Demands. *Modern Asian Studies* 27:2, pp.297–319.

'The Peach Boy': a *mukashi banashi*[92]?

By beginning with the fairy-tale words "Mukashi mukashi" (Once upon a time), the opening sentence acts as a signal to the reader that she is embarking upon a supremely readerly text, a *mukashi banashi* which is to say a tale from long ago or a folk tale. Yet whereas the standard version of the tale[93] begins with the old woman washing clothes at the river and her delight at finding the peach, Akutagawa's version opens with the absurdly mythical peach tree whose fateful branches spread above the clouds and whose roots delve down to the depths of the underworld. Yet already, we may discern a rather impertinent tone in the flippancy of the description of the flowers "like deep crimson silk umbrellas with golden tassels hanging down" more discernible when juxtaposed against the august majesty of the ancient tree.

Clearly intending to impart a providential tale, the narrator describes in lofty terms the fateful mechanics of delivering the divinely conceived peach into human hands. That morning, fate had taken the form of the raven Yatagarasu who pecked a small crimson fruit which then winged its way to the land where humans live. According to legend, this raven was sent from heaven as a guide for the Emperor Jimmu on his journey to Yamato. The appearance of the bird is generally construed as evidence of the will of Heaven or divine intervention in human affairs. Set against this divine backdrop, Akutagawa then skates

[92] *Mukashi banashi* can be variously translated as folk tales, legends of long ago or folklore.
[93] *Jinjō shogakkō tokuhon* (Primary School Reader) 1887 as translated by Henry 2009, pp.213–4.

bathetically over details of the couple because they are so well-known to all the children of Japan:

> What kind of people was it whose hands picked up this fruit after it had left the heart of the mountain and which was bearing a baby? – I probably don't have to say all that all over again. At the end of the mountain stream was an old woman, as all Japan's children know, washing the clothes or something of an old man who had gone out to cut wood... (ARZ7:49)

Since the tale is so well known, the narrator clearly feels that he is not compelled to give all the details of the reception of the peach but he thereby gives the impression that he is merely rehashing a well-rehearsed tale or that it is a tale he can only half remember.

In the standard version, the old childless couple are happy at long last to have a child so that they might continue the family lineage, thereby honouring their ancestors (the family in microcosm) and the nation (the family in macrocosm). This family motif frames the standard version for when the victorious Momotarō returns triumphant to his native home he thereby honours his parents, his country and is the model of patriotic filial piety (Polen 1999, p.11). In Akutagawa's version however, not only does the narrator not comment on the old couple's joy at receiving the child but he also misses out the entirety of his infancy and races forward to depict them as utterly at their wits' end in so exhausted by Momotarō's naughtiness that they hope to get rid of him at the earliest opportunity:

> By the time they heard of this, the old couple's indulgence was so utterly exhausted by the boy's naughtiness that they did whatever was necessary to send him on his way as quickly as possible… (ARZ7:49)

In part five Momotarō does return triumphantly to his home town but his parents are not even mentioned and he certainly does not live happily ever after as the incarnation of patriotic loyalty and filial piety the reader expects. In the *tokuhon* version Momotarō's mission is to restore justice by retrieving the treasure which had been stolen by the devils whereas in Akutagawa's version it is because he is too lazy to work and would therefore prefer to steal the riches of others. If the Meiji objective had been to exalt the revered feudal patterns of loyalty and relocate them within the axis of the imperial family (Maruyama 1971, p.44, quoted in Antoni 1991, p.159), then here alone is a strong metaphor for its subversion.

Momotarō is required by the generic limitations of the tale to be a devoted son to both his immediate and the imperial family just as he is expected to be the personification of generosity and selflessness. The standard version has Momotarō giving away, when asked and without prevarication, his precious millet dumplings to the dog, the monkey and the pheasant in return for which they naturally become his happy and faithful followers. Triumphant in his mission, he also shares his treasures with his animals and with the old couple. In Akutagawa's version however Momotarō takes out his abacus and offers the starving dog only half a dumpling. Unmoved by the dog's persistent pleas, Momotarō holds his ground and the dog reluctantly agrees to his price. The narrator then remarks that:

> After all, like in all trade, he who has not must surrender to the will of he who has. (ARZ7:50)

This pithy Nietzschean axiom expressed as a Confucian-style article of faith appears comical and also somewhat sinister in the satirised context, its dark humour undermining the sincerity of the apparently objective authorial stance. In its modern, money-based perversion of the apparently noble lord/retainer relationship we are brought to criticise the exploitative nature of modern market trade. The same can be seen in Akutagawa's rewriting of 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab*'* which presents the legendary squabble between the monkey and the crab as a transactional misunderstanding and monumental stitch-up by the legal profession who are in cahoots with captains of industry keen to root out leftist ideas then in vogue. While Sekiguchi sees 'The Peach Boy' and 'The General' as early works of proletarian literature (2000, p.554) it is also possible that by taking the dog and the other unlikely beasts as servants, Akutagawa may be satirising the gripes of the proletarian movement.[94] The dog is hardly conscious of his position in the capitalist system whereas in 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab*'* Kropotkin apparently used the example of the crab's eldest son to illustrate the concept of mutual aid then in vogue in an aside which utterly ridicules this latter ideology. The eldest son of the crab supposedly changes his ways after the trial and takes a job as a clerk or some such in a stockbroker's office and reputedly drags an injured companion into his hole so that he might savour the flesh of his own species – hardly the idealistic vision of mutual aid syndicalists at the time would have professed.

The notion of Momotarō as the righteous leader of his loyal troupe is further overturned in Akutagawa's version. In the standard version the improbable trio of animals overcome their differences and are united under Momotarō's strong and natural leadership in a common patriotic cause. In Akutagawa's version, not only does Momotarō exploit the three beasts but, precisely because their allegiance is based on money rather than fealty or a noble moral cause, they have no loyalty to each other, apart from the dog who is kept starving and is in any case described as slow-witted. Momotarō fails to unite the constantly feuding trinity, each member remaining true to its stereotype. In the standard version the unlikely coming together of the beasts may be seen as an object lesson in tolerance and duty whereas Akutagawa playfully describes the carnival of modern individualism bound only by money. He makes an obvious nod to the Confucian morals of the standard version when he describes the pheasant urging the monkey to obey the morals of servants and masters and dutifully follow Momotarō for the whole of his mortal life. The monkey is hilariously unaware of the pheasant's ridiculously decontextualised teaching because he has climbed a tree in order to escape the dog who is trying to bite him to death. In folk tradition, pheasants were thought to be able to predict earthquakes (Henry 2009, p.223). Akutagawa, by linking the pheasant's apparent expertise in seismology with his erudite wisdom on Confucian values subtly undermines the basis of the latter.[95] Not only is it not

[95] Might we also see in the inclusion of the pheasant as an expert on earthquakes a rather wry critique of such folk knowledge given the recent catastrophic Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923? In 'Aru jikeidanin no kotoba' ('Words of a Certain Vigilante') in 'Words of a Dwarf' the narrator remarks upon the horror of the earthquake which sits in stark contrast to the blissful ignorance of nature as symbolised by the peaceful sleep of a bird high in the treetops, utterly free of paralysing human anxiety (ARZ13:44).

the absurd reasoning of the sophist pheasant which placates the monkey but it is the lure of financial gain which finally convinces the monkey to continue in the expedition.

Joining the ultra-nationalistic *hinomaru* (Rising Sun) flag with the cheap bait of unlimited riches, Akutagawa skilfully undermines the righteousness of the cause by exposing its underlying powerful monetary incentive, a fairly transparent wink to Japanese designs on China. The expedition is designed to loot the treasure of the unsuspecting and harmless "devils" rather than civilise them. What is more, Momotarō's selfish, conniving and exploitative nature is further highlighted when he appeals to the monkey's naturally greedy nature by mentioning the treasure while also making it clear that he does not plan to share any of it with his companions. Rather than being the gracious leader we expect, Momotarō is shown to bring out the basest instincts in his servants, particularly the age-old cupidity of the monkey here transformed into a modern, individualistic, grasping profiteer. In its sister tale 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab', the narrator hilariously unites the feudal with the modern capitalist mode when he describes the prophetic dream envisioned simultaneously by the judge, the prosecuting barrister, the barrister for the defence, the jailer, the prison chaplain and the executioner. Each dreamed of heaven which, according to interviews, appeared like a department store built along the lines of a feudal castle (ARZ9:283).

A further obvious subversion in Akutagawa's 'The Peach Boy' is of course the depiction of the devils as innocents, their island as a heavenly paradise and, inversely, the humans as demonic. The island is first presented as an atemporal, universal tropical paradise, a well-known mythical device with

which to contrast civilisation and the natural state of man. This motif satirises the colonising mission as a necessarily civilising one and was one the writer would revisit in *Kappa* (1927). Described as a solitary island in a far distant sea, Devils' Island might symbolise any number of places from the Ryūkyū Islands to Taiwan. The narrator invokes the popular image of Devils' Island as a backward, uncivilised place and swiftly reverses this representation. While still depicting it as an almost prelapsarian paradise he attacks not only the Japanese colonising mission but also the Christian basis of the proselytising European mission which it emulated, a theme to which the writer would return in 'The Man from the West'. Alternatively, might we also read in this comparison a subtle allusion to the forced opening of Japan, "a solitary island" by the Perry expedition in the 1860s which found its literary articulation in such works as *Madame Chrysanthème* (1888), as we saw in our chapter on 'The Ball'? In any case, the universalised Devils' Island can certainly be seen as a metaphor for the violence of all colonisation in general and Japanese colonialism in particular as well as the civilised/uncivilised dichotomy by which invasion is invariably justified. This would be particularly poignant to Akutagawa who held the Chinese Classics in such high regard.

The narrator moves adroitly from flattering the reader's *amour-propre* when he depicts the female devils as being just as virtuous and upstanding as modern Japanese women to denigrating her as a member of an indescribably revolting race. The narrator subverts our expectations by presenting the devil women not as backward barbarians but rather as cultured creatures not unlike modern Japanese women. In this way the narrator introduces everyday time and hence a kind of double voicing. He cleverly alludes to the Meiji reification of

patriotic and dutiful domesticity of the *ryosai kenbo* ideology (good wife, wise mother) and its concomitant deference to women as the guardians of Japanese traditions:

> …the devils' wives and daughters lived not in the least bit differently from our own human wives and daughters weaving at the loom, brewing sake or preparing bunches of orchids. (p.52)

This defamiliarisation is continued in the graphic description of the humans: "with their lack of horns and their pallid faces, hands and feet" (p.52) and not only exposes the fabrication of the feminine ideal which has to resort to lead powder for cosmetic beauty but also highlights the absurdity of the othering discourse of colonisation which, after Gobineau, justified colonisation on ethnocentric grounds[96]. The theme is further developed in the subsequent dismantling of the received idea of Momotarō's conquest as a civilising one. The conquered island is depicted not as an uncivilised wasteland but as a nation state with all the inviolable constitutional rights that such a designation naturally entails. In this way the conquest presents an act of aggression, an unjustified and unprovoked use of armed force against the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Devils' Island as a nation state rather than the civilising mission of a superior culture over a barbarian wasteland. More terror is inflicted on it by Momotarō than at any time during its national history (p.53) and Momotarō is depicted as a ruthless and tyrannical leader. Furthermore, it is

[96] Gobineau's *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (*Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*, 1853–55) argued that there were differences between human races and that the European race was supreme.

a dishonourable subjugation because the devils are themselves unarmed, having forgotten the metal clubs with which they are popularly and erroneously depicted. The narrator describes the “peerless loyalty and bravery” (p.53) of the dog, monkey and pheasant mercenaries only to undermine the noble description by admitting that they were kept starving. The so-called bravery of the slow-witted dog and the platitude-spouting pheasant can hardly be demonstrated by their killing of the devil children. The monkey, closest relation to the human, inflicts particular cruelty by raping the devil girls before strangling them, perhaps mirroring the harrowing accounts of mass rape by the Japanese Akutagawa had heard when in China (Sekiguchi 1999, p.434).

In the standard version of the tale, the battle between the righteous Momotarō and the cruel and deceitful devils is described as fair and righteous and ultimately testifies to Momotarō’s superior physical and moral power and the laudable team work of the battalion. The devils recognise their own wrong-doing, the merciful Momotarō spares them their lives and the devils gratefully offer him treasure as recompense. Akutagawa’s story by contrast sees Momotarō commit all manner of evil deeds, plunder treasure and demand child hostages. The humiliated chieftain is utterly bewildered and asks for an explanation. Momotarō’s reply is an absurd non sequitur which amply reflects his irrationality and egoism. Here we are reminded of the earlier axiom “he who has not must bow to the power of he who has”: subjection not for any moral reason but out of tyrannical brute force.

We saw earlier how the standard version of the tale concludes by returning the glorious Momotarō to the old couple as a dutiful son thereby honouring both his family and the nation. In Akutagawa’s version the old couple

are not mentioned again and Momotarō's return to his home town, far from being the happy ending the reader expects, is in fact the beginning of his misfortune. The pheasant is murdered in his new role as security guard and the monkey is decapitated in a morbid case of mistaken identity. The black humour of these chaotic mishaps is in exquisite contrast to the apparently divinely ordered conception of the Momotarō mission and reveals the whole affair to be absurd. Furthermore, news of a nascent May Fourth-like independence movement on the island complete with a coconut bomb-making operation puts paid to any notion of the irrevocability of the Momotarō legacy as well as allowing the devils to have the last word in a kind of carnivalesque "talking back".

Temporal Chaos and the Dubious Narrator

It is not only plot but also narrative voice and temporal confusion which give Akutagawa's version its inimitable force. It is in the confusion of timeframes that the mythical status of the tale is undone and it is the dubious narrative voice which further undermines the univocal potency of the canonic tale. The standard version of the tale takes place in epic-adventure time. Suitably removed from the present by the distancing "mukashi mukashi" trope, the action unfolds within an unspecified yet ultimately unified time frame which comes to a natural conclusion when the hero completes the task which defines him and returns to where the story began, with the old couple. The authoritative narrator observes the action and the use of direct speech allows the reader to believe in

the tale's verisimilitude. Bakhtin makes the point that folkloric storytellers traditionally have limited ideological perspectives and that epic heroes, because they are not allowed a private, psychological dimension are essentially anti-novelistic (1981, p.312). Theirs is an essentially uncontested world which encourages an unconditional allegiance to their world view (p.342).

Akutagawa's version, by contrast, muddles different time frames and reveals the narrator to be supremely subjective in order to create a highly subversive metafictional tale which has wider implications for the status of fiction in general and the novel in particular. It mixes epic, adventure and novelistic time from the very first paragraph. Beginning with the instantly recognisable folkloric "mukashi mukashi" formula, the tale opens in an epic, universal time frame. A wink to mythico-historical time is introduced by reference to "the time of the beginning of heaven and earth" (p.48) and to Izanagi who hovers between history and fable. The colloquial tone of novelistic time is added by the narrator's personal and contemporaneous interjection about the actual size and origins of the mythical peach tree:

> I don't think saying it was big really does it justice. […] When heaven and earth began, Izanagi no Mikoto threw some peaches in order to drive the thunder towards Yomotsu Hirasaka: that same fruit of the age of the gods has grown into the branches of this tree. (p.48)

The narrator flits back and forth between narrative timeframes and voices to hybridise the tale and undermine its mythical status. He moves from lofty, epic narration, connecting the tale to "the dawn of the world", to a more childlike, fairy-tale style, noting that the flowers look like "deep crimson silk umbrellas with

golden tassels hanging down."[97] In the same breath he shifts to a flippant, colloquial style: "The fruit – it goes without saying that the fruit was also big." This modern colloquial novelistic narrator is evident throughout the story but instead of unifying meaning, he undermines it at every turn as can be seen in the following exemplary extract:

> What kind of people was it whose hands picked up this fruit after it had left the heart of the mountain and which was bearing a baby? – I probably don't have to say all that all over again. At the end of the mountain stream was an old woman, as all children in Japan know, washing the clothes or something of an old man who went to cut wood … (p.49)

The mention of "all children of Japan" makes it clear that the tale as a national myth is being parodied precisely in its capacity as a fairy tale while the narrative uncertainty of the "or something" explodes the novel's claim to being written by an omniscient narrator: here he admits to simply rehashing an old tale and not troubling himself to check the details.

Part of the experimentation with narrative voice is the narrator's play with different tempos to include epic folk-mythological time, adventure time, contemporary linear time and cyclical time. For instance, the narrator draws attention to the distension of mythological time and its collision with adventure time when he notes how the fruit, borne once every ten thousand years, will not fall to the ground for another thousand years before accelerating the descent of the fateful peach to the land where the humans live and the beginning of Momotarō's adventure and his speeded-up development into a work-shy young

[97] We are reminded here of the overblown description of chrysanthemums at the beginning of 'The Ball', verging on the artificial and "tasselling forth in a riotous profusion".

man. The gap between the miraculous birth of Momotarō and his beginning, almost as a casual aside, to think about conquering Devils' Island is uncomfortably stark and unexplained. In the standard tale, Momotarō has an inherent strength and courage which is matched by his divine sense of mission from a very young age. In Akutagawa's version time flits forward within a sentence to Momotarō as an irresponsible young man while his old "parents", who do not age but who remain "old" in a queer, flat time, are already quite fed up with him. Having skated over the details of his upbringing and the couple's parenting skills, the reader is propelled towards the protagonist's non-mission and time at this point slows down to a more leisurely adventure time in which the preparations for the mission are elucidated.

The epic does not typically allow for development of the hero's character or insights into his emotions or thoughts as he is always defined by an inalienable motivation expressed in his heroic actions. In Akutagawa's depiction however not only are his innermost motivations explained but they also paradoxically situate him as an anti-hero:

> Momotarō, born from the peach, came up with the idea of an expedition to conquer Devils' Island. The reason he came up with this kind of idea was that he did not want to work… (p.49)

It is unclear whether the vagueness of Momotarō's "coming up with the idea" is due to his feckless temperament or whether it is because the narrator himself does not really know the reason. In either case, that the narrator thinks it is acceptable to present a noble protagonist planning his expedition because he hated working demonstrates his unfitness as an epic narrator as equally as it

demonstrates Momotarō's unfitness to be an epic protagonist. There is a simple logic in the reasoning which mirrors the rationale of the epic and exposes it to be ridiculous. Moreover, by allowing his narrator a controversial, interpretive voice, Akutagawa dismantles the monoglossic intention of the standard version and undermines the will to impartial verisimilitude of the modern I-novel narrator. Yet, while this narrative voice identifies the narrator as a modern I-novelist, the reasons given for Momotarō's expedition are hardly the emotionally complex iterations of the typical modern I-novel. This feature is echoed when Momotarō explains his motivations to the conquered devils:

> Because I intended to conquer Devils' Island all along, even if I had to use some millet dumplings to employ them [his army of three animals]. – How's that? Do you understand yet? If you don't I will kill you all. (p.54)

Here he is, driven like all epic heroes by a unified motivation. The motivation to conquer the island is not however a means to a more noble end such as establishing civilisation but is an absurd end in itself. So it is then that the narrator presents himself as an epic narrator and a modern narrator even as he fails to fulfil either of these narrative functions. If Bakhtin contrasts the epic as the locus of an uncontested hieratic world binding its audience in a common ideological cause with the novel which is essentially a speaking discourse with its speaking narrator as ideologue, then Akutagawa expressly parodies both genres and makes them collide in his version of the canonic tale.

Returning to the childlike fairy-tale style to describe the tropical paradise of the Devils' Island, the narrator interrupts himself for a moment to speculate

on the provenance of the poor reputation of the devils. This, he hypothesises, must be due to the unreliability of a previous narrator. The mythical maidens who claimed to have been abducted by the devils may well have slandered the devils for reasons unknown and in any case, their claim is undermined by the fact that they are, by their very gender, unreliable:

> … and here I am not questioning the truth or otherwise of the accusation, but the report did come from the women themselves. Whether you believe the women or not – well, I have been entertaining this doubt for the past twenty years. (p.52)

Might we also see here a wink to the silencing of women's voices following the alleged mass rape by the Japanese of Chinese women as reported to Akutagawa when he visited China as a reporter in 1921? The narrator, who we had earlier doubted in his role as folkloric story-teller, here seems to actively dispute the received story since it was conveyed by women: a doubting narrator questioning a dubious narrator. A similar device was used in 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab' when the veracity of the tale was unpicked in the court room and left to be found wanting.

Might we also detect Akutagawa at this point gently winking at the contemporary discourse surrounding the I-novel which centred on a vision of (re)presentation as a direct and unmediated revelation of the world which he viewed not only as flawed ontological thinking but also as deviously obscuring the ideological motivation at its heart? To present one version of the devils as contingent and replace it with another which concedes its own speciousness emphasises to the reader the instability of the written record. The

conversational confidence that the narrator has been mulling over the question for almost two decades reiterates his lack of confidence and the ultimate unknowability of the truth while it situates him as a supremely contingent observer rather than an omniscient narrator. Furthermore, in his posture as a modern historian, that he should spend so much time dissecting a story about maidens being abducted by devils makes him appear "just a little crazy" himself.

The narrator continues to bring the tale squarely within modern linear time by interjecting further about contemporary readers and their similarity with the characters of the story. Since the devil women and girls were paragons of domestic virtue they may be said to be just like our own wives and daughters. This confrontation of the folkloric with the modern has the effect that we are forced to view hitherto mythical events as part of our tangible world, rendering them at once more vivid and more absurd in their juxtaposition. By observing modern women and girls acting out story-book roles in this way means that we see both contemporary and adventure-time depictions as far-fetched.

Such collisions of time are repeated in the addendum to the classical tale in which the story is propelled into the future in order to undo the "happily ever after" fairy-tale resolution. The narrator asserts that:

> All of Japan's children know the tale up to this point. However Momotarō did not necessarily live happily ever after. (p.55)

Yet the narrator cannot vouch for all the facts, admitting like some tabloid journalist that "rumour has it" that the monkey was killed in a case of mistaken identity. The absurd after-story is the most extreme temporal and stylistic juxtaposition: the historical and novelistic account of the bomb plotters collides

with the mythical depiction of the peach tree which still "exists to this day". The final word is given to the doubting narrator who parodies the trope of the interpretive postscript by his mysterious and ultimately unfinished musing. This puzzling returns the reader to the beginning of the story none the wiser and sinisterly unsettled in his reflections on a mythical past, a mythologised present and a dimly ominous future:

> When will that raven Yatagarasu next appear on the treetop? Ah! So many future geniuses are still sleeping in those kernels… (p.56)

Chillingly at this point we are reminded of the vision of Christ in 'The Man from the West' that the Christ child we envision as divine and unique was merely one of a number of Christ children who could have been born in a perverted, not to mention blasphemous example of historical counterfactuals. Yet in 'The Peach Boy' the reportage is still inflected with the romantic tone of the story-teller. Plotting independence for their country as the young devils made explosives out of coconuts: "their sparkling eyes the size of teacups, they may even have forgotten to fall in love with the devils' gentle daughters". Perhaps here too we are reminded of our early assertion that "reality", to become palatable, needs to be romanticised.

In its topical depiction of underground resistance movements and bomb-making facilities the explosion of mythical time is complete and the tale is maladroitly annexed to contemporary time. We shall see how this temporal stance was employed again in 'The Man from the West' which, as we have seen, shares much with the narrative stance of 'The Peach Boy'. In opposition

to epic time in which all possible outcomes are foreclosed, the story cannot be completely resolved since we do not know, “even today”, whether the devils managed to overthrow the tyrannical regime which oppressed them. Yet the narrator doubts further. By finally projecting the ending into an unknown mythical future, the narrator completely abdicates his role as adjudicator both as an I-novelist and as an epic voice. The ending moves the action from an awkward epic-historical time to a mythic-cyclical time by presenting the possibility of endless returns in order to undercut the supposed uniqueness and hallowed closure of the tale. The reader, who has always viewed this story as a singular if not providential tale, is forced to recognise that it will undoubtedly be repeated in myriad form for all eternity, like some unhappy Nietzschean eternal return. Dazzled by the confusion of styles and timeframes, the reader is left quite simply unable to situate the tale and secure its meaning.

‘The Peach Boy’: a Conflation of Tales and Incorporated Genres

Just as Akutagawa’s ‘The Peach Boy’ uses parody, narrative voice and narrative time-frames to subvert the significance of the official story, so it also satirises its accepted monoglossic form to question the homogenising bases of myths in general and the Japanese imperial myth in particular. It does so by conflating several canonical myths and generic styles, the significance of which relies on a certain complicity with the reader, making this a supremely writerly text. The narrator begins this process by relativising two myths, that of ‘The

Peach Boy' and the myth of the Japanese nation's divine ancestry as testified in the oldest extant work in Japan, the *Kojiki* which aims to assert the Imperial family's legitimacy to the people and prove the Emperor's divine origin. By linking the two stories, the narrator not only shows how artificially the modern ideology of 'The Peach Boy' has been justified as a sacred text but also how the teleological vision of the nation presented in the *Kojiki* is merely a fairy tale. If 'The Peach Boy' can be presented differently, then so can the *Kojiki*. To make this bold move would be inflammatory but to suggest it by juxtaposition is subtle while no less suggestive. This technique is radical because it throws into relief the necessarily textual nature of mythmaking without stating it explicitly. Rather, the onus is on the reader who is led to reach this conclusion via a seemingly passive "readerly" narrative technique.

In the opening paragraph, we have seen how the narrator joins the totalising narrative of the 'The Peach Boy' legend, the univocal authority of the Izanagi myth of the origin of the Japanese nation with a modern, colloquial, novelistic style. By cleverly juxtaposing the childlike beginning encapsulated within the folktale signifiers "once upon a time" (*mukashi mukashi*) with the gravity of the *Kojiki* history and its sober"land of the dead" (*yomi no kuni*) and its "age of the gods" (*kamiyo*), the narrator throws both the legend and the myth into sharp relief to upset them both. It is true that the narrative style of the *Kojiki* shares its straightforward, childlike tone with the standard 'The Peach Boy' tale but in both texts the narrator maintains a dispassionate voice to ensure an untroubled reception of the story. In Akutagawa's version in contrast, the intrusion of the questioning, colloquial narrator as well as an infantilising voice introduces a

spurious levity and dislocates the absolute authority of the legend's narrator. The posited author here is a purely compositional device which strengthens the movement towards relativity in direct opposition to folkloric story tellers who are required to have limited verbal points of view in order to create an uncontested world of shared meaning. The intrusion of the modern author here destroys the mythical and magical attitude towards the written word (Bakhtin 1981, p.369). The reader is urged to see the artifice of linking the advent of 'The Peach Boy' with the divine ancestry myth in the *Kojiki* story with its protective peaches which, in the standard version of the tale, is presented as natural and providential.

By association it is clear that the legitimation of a fairy-tale legend by means of an indisputable "history" not only undermines the authority of the framing Izanagi history which is also, by implication, turned into a fairy tale but also reveals the mechanics of how textual meaning has been created in the newly canonical 'The Peach Boy'. This ironising process of recontextualising and redefining characters and stories prevents any final vocabulary becoming salient and therefore reveals all truth to be contingent. This juxtaposition is continued in the second paragraph. The narrator again resorts to the "*mukashi mukashi*" device as if to remind the reader who may have been distracted by the narrative detail that she is actually in a classic fairy tale with a trustworthy narrator. This time new magical elements, missing from the almost realist standard version, are introduced:

> Its fruit, borne once every ten thousand years, would not fall to the ground for another thousand years yet. (p.48)

The narrator presents this wildly extravagant claim as natural and self-evident rather as the narrator in Book 1 Chapter 7 of the *Kojiki* relays the information that Izanami produces islands through her vomit, faeces and urine (Phlippi 1968, p.57). The narrator once more incorporates a well-known reference from the *Kojiki*: the divinely sent crow Yatagarasu lands fatefully on the branches of the peach tree and sets in motion the preordained journey of Momotarō. In Book Two of the *Kojiki* this bird guides Emperor Jimmu on his way from Kumano to Yamatō and as such adds a providential element to the mythical story. Yet that this bird which is described as "mythical" might reappear in another story seems suspicious. Furthermore, by introducing him here, the bird serves to liken Momotarō to that divine ancestor of the Japanese nation. In this way the sacred imperial forebear is, by association, tarnished as a moneygrubbing monomaniac rather than as the exalted and holy founder of a righteous spiritual community.[98]

A similar method would be used to simultaneously reveal and undermine the providential appearance of the star announcing the birth of Christ to the Wise Men in 'The Man from the West' when one of the Wise Men, jaded by the appearance of so many christs merely utters: "Again?" This device is repeated at the end of 'The Peach Boy' when the narrator wonders how many other prodigies still sleep within the fruits of the mythical peach tree and will one day tumble to earth to fulfil their destiny. This at once destroys the unique teleology of the Japanese imperial myth just as it does that of the 'The Peach Boy' story.

[98] Interestingly, this idea may have presented itself to Akutagawa as early as 1914 when he translated *Balthasar*, a short story by Anatole France which narrates the back story of one of the Wise Men as he came to follow the star which led him to the birth of Jesus Christ. As in the other works in this collection such as *The Daughter of Lilith* (which suggests that Adam had an additional wife to Eve and therefore humanity a whole branch of the family tree of which it is ignorant) France casts a sceptical eye on Christian orthodoxy, a theme we take up in detail in chapter five on 'The Man from the West'.

By recalling to mind Nietzsche's eternal return[99] to which Akutagawa had alluded in 'Hoshi' ('Star') in 'A Dwarf's Words' (ARZ13:27), the narrator replaces the sense of linear time which is necessarily teleological and progressive with cyclical time which is its ideological opposite. Musing with French socialist Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805–91) on the philosophical opposition of providence as it is constructed in Japanese and Christian ontologies and other scientific possibilities in 'Hoshi' in 'A Dwarf's Words', the narrator wonders whether there might be other universes in the world. He undercuts the providential mission of our own destiny as it has been described:

> Perhaps there is a poet who has already written with the highest genius: "Stars are made from dust of which I am a part. Yet stars, have the same vicissitudes as we do." How tedious! (ARZ13:28)

In this way the sense of destiny which pervades Japanese imperial history as it had been written in the Nara period[100] and was being calqued in the Meiji and

[99] The "eternal return" is the idea that with infinite time and a finite number of events, events will recur again and again infinitely. Auguste Blanqui's *L'éternité par les astres* (1872), referenced in 'A Dwarf's Words', may have provided some of the inspiration for Nietzsche's theory which he reprised at many points including *The Gay Science*, *Ecce Homo* and *Thus spoke Zarathustra*.

[100] The Nara Period 710–784 AD in which two official histories, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki,* were compiled as well as the *Manyō-shū,* an anthology of native poetry. With the adoption of the imperial title *tennō,* translated from the Chinese and meaning "heavenly emperor," the Chinese concept of the emperor as the supreme symbol of central government rule was incorporated into the native Japanese interpretation of the emperor. See Kōnoshi Takamitsu, 2000: 'Constructing Imperial Mythology: Kojiki and Nihon Shoki'. In: Shirane and Suzuki, *Inventing the Classics: Modernity, National Identity and Japanese Literature,* pp.51–70.

Taishō regimes, and of which 'The Peach Boy' is a microcosm, is deflated and open to infinite reiterations by a poet bored by his own romantic stereotypes.

The narrator vacillates between the lofty reprisal of the *Kojiki* and the inflated children's fairy-tale descriptions of the "divine" peach flowers as "deep crimson silk umbrellas with golden tassels hanging down" (p.48) to add an exquisite touch of bathos which subtly designates both styles as absurd. The grandiose, epic resonances of the first part are quickly contrasted with the colloquial, novelistic tone of the second. Akutagawa is sure to incorporate the famously childlike direct speech of the classic fairy tale when the dog asks after the millet dumplings, reminding the reader of the passive and readerly genre his tale is set to parody. After subverting this expectation by having the beasts stray from their expected roles as loyal servants and descend into a decidedly unfairytale-like brawl, the narrator, in a supreme act of metafictional intertextuality, then links the characters of this drama with those of another canonic tale, 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab':

> […] the dog, howling in rage, tried to bite the monkey to death. If the pheasant had not stopped him, the monkey might not have survived to be killed in revenge by the crab in the crab story. (p.50)

By mixing canonic stories and characters, the narrator carnivalises the ideas and truths presented in them, contesting their authority and suggesting that they all demand equal dialogic status. Following Bakhtin, we are reminded that we may only accept the epic world, presented here as the mythical imperial past, with reverence (1981, p.17). Timeless and not localised into any actual

historical sequence, to collide these canonic tales and bring them close to the reader is to make them comical and therefore to desacralise them (p.23). This "carnivalisation of legends" brings the inaccessible within reach as the narrator appears to converse with the character in real time. No longer sacrosanct, the presentation of legend becomes merely one of many possible ways to hypothesise meaning. A "jolly relativity" of all things is proclaimed by alternative voices within the carnivalised literary text which de-privileges the authoritative voice. With its overt echoes of the ironically deterministic *Jacques le Fataliste*[101] or indeed the happily providential Panglossianism of *Candide*[102], the narrator relies on the reader to use these literary associations to locate the folk tale within the locus of European scepticism and thereby deny the tale its monoglossic ambition. By self-consciously addressing the very devices of fiction, the narrator draws attention to its status as an artefact and poses questions about the relationship between fiction and reality in a typically modernist fashion.

This metafictional trope is continued in part three in the description of the devils' island as a natural paradise. The polemical end of the stereotypical tropical utopia as a foil for the sinfulness of "cultivated" places is an instantly recognisably literary device, familiar from such works as *Candide*, *Gulliver's Travels* and other literary classics. By association the reader understands that the purpose of the description is to satirise and to invert the agreed polarity of

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[101] Written by Diderot between 1765 and 1780 to undermine the main character's philosophy that everything that happens to us down here, whether for good or for evil, has been written up above on a "great scroll" that is unrolled a little bit at a time. The story is continually interrupted by other characters as well as the reader while the narrator tires of his role and asks the reader to supply key details at times.

[102] Voltaire's *Candide ou l'optimisme* was written in 1759 upsets in the face of disaster and misfortune the Leibnizian philosophy of the protagonist's teacher that "all is for the best in the best possible of worlds".

civilisation and barbarism. We have already noted how Akutagawa had used the device before in 'Tobacco and the Devil' in which we read with bathos of the Devil's disappointment on reaching Japan that what he finds does not match his expectations based on his reading of Marco Polo. To have recourse to this classic trope hints at the polemical motivation of Akutagawa's version – for the reader to recognise herself as she truly is, as a member of an aggressive race of warmongers rather than the orchid-tending peaceful mother she would ordinarily flatter herself to be.

This inversion is in sharp relief with the *otogi zōshi*, the so-called "companion tales" of the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries which were written "straight" as it were for moral or religious edification (Reider 2005, p.208), some of which are referred to in the third part of Akutagawa's 'The Peach Boy'. The story of 'The Drunkard Boy', the sake-drinking demon conquered by Minamoto no Raikō (948–1021) for instance is glibly mentioned in passing in the same sentence as Ibaragi Dōji, the devil who terrorised the Rashōmon gate and who lost an arm in mortal combat. That the opening of 'The Drunkard Boy' has been parodied in 'The Peach Boy' can hardly be coincidental:

> A long time ago in Japan, a divine country from the time heaven and earth were divided… (Reider 2005, p.212).

Once more *Momotarō* is set within a dizzying carnival of other literary texts. However, whereas the simple plot of 'The Drunkard Boy', 'The Peach Boy' and other traditional tales pin the forces of good against evil, Akutagawa's 'The Peach Boy' parodies the narrative formula of these stories to utterly undermine their didactic end. Far from illustrating the assumed auspicious divine mandate

of governance and warfare it reveals, mystifies and subverts the means by which such an end was achieved (Reider 2005, p.212).

The first half of part three is a bewildering and subtly comical whirlwind of extra-literary references. A number of characters from other well-known fairy tales attest to the Epicureanism of the peace-loving devils who are thereby incorporated into a carnival of extratextual references. For instance the dancing devil who appears in 'Kobu-tori Jiisan' ('The Old Man with a Lump'), a famous story from the *Konjaku Monogatari* (*Tales of Past and Present*, c.1120) confirms that the devils on Devils' Island liked to dance all night long. Issun-bōshi (Little One Inch), the dwarf born to an old childless couple who goes on to defeat the devils rather like Momotarō and marry the princess vouches for the enchantment of one devil by a princess. The inclusion of these legendary characters is powerful for a number of reasons. Firstly, the narrator highlights the fictive discourse of legend precisely at the point at which it is seen to hover between myth and historical fact. Existing in discrete stories and for specific moral reasons in the reader's mind, to bring them together in this way is to undermine their canonic reality: they are literally dialogised. Secondly, by having the legendary characters recount the devils' island story from their own perspective (the dancing devil sees dancing, the princess-loving dwarf sees princess adoration) the narrator draws attention to the perspectival, subjective nature of all narrative, legend, story or history, thereby undermining their pretence to objective truth. Legendary characters are necessarily denied agency for their existence is always merely to embody and illustrate a timeless message from which they may not waver. Imagining them differently in this way is to imagine other endings to these preordained tales which is ideologically

inconceivable. Moreover, the reader is moved to feel sympathy and compassion for these innocent and peace-loving devils who had not seen such terror since the mythical founding of their own kingdom, a deft reversal of the devil/human relationship.

The suspension of belief is continued with the inclusion of 'The Drunkard Boy'. This famous and popular *oni* (devil) legend is coupled with another Minamoto folk tale: that of 'Ibaraki Dōji' ('The Ibaraki Child'). This infamous devil, the servant of 'The Drunkard Boy' supposedly went on a rampage in Kyoto, according to the Heian tale. When the narrator points out that both demons are popularly regarded as uncommon villains he likens them to modern Ginza-loving pleasure-seekers. In this association of the devils with modern Taishō dilettantes he extracts them from epic time and inserts them into historical time, encouraging the reader to see the likeness between the two ages and to conceive of the modern age mythically. He also illustrates how perfectly natural it is to have the modern age inhabited by legendary figures, perhaps indicating how such stories would have featured in modern newspapers next to articles on current affairs (Henry 2009, p.103). In this way he reprises the fundamental Akutagawan idea that we only ever apprehend the world through received narrative: we fictionalise the present in order to make it understandable.

In 'Subjective Portraits' Akutagawa posits that fictional characters become more powerful than real historical figures because they are able to capture the imagination in a way that reality does not. The inverse is also true: reality only impresses if it is presented imaginatively. Since this is the case, Akutagawa notes that we will always fictionalise the historical. Mythical figures exist not merely on the page but they enter our consciousness and return

eternally to be part of contemporary society in renewed form, “breathing the same air as we do” (ARZ11:197), to be part of a shared national imagination. A powerful illusion, this mythification can be said to characterise the modern imagination which cares little for the real. Akutagawa illustrates his point in his essay on Iwami Jutarō. Jutarō was a semi-legendary figure reported to have fought in Toyotomi Hideoyoshi’s service and who died in the siege of Osaka Castle in 1615 (Henry 2009, p.101). Popular tales of this fierce warrior were endlessly retold in kabuki, oral story-telling and in illustrated books. In his essay, Akutagawa contrasts him with one of the primary architects of modern imperial Japan, Gotō Shimpei, a recent governor of Tokyo (1857–1929) who espoused an aggressive expansionist policy and was, in many ways, no less impressive than the heroic Jutarō. Gotō seems dull in comparison to the endlessly reimagined hero and he will not seize the popular imagination unless he is allowed to exist imaginatively. Such an imagination “not only lives in our emotions, but more than that rules our will” (ARZ11:197) and indicates the importance of popular heroes, or rather their mythification, to politics and political will.

There is more than mere fancy in Akutagwa’s thinking on the role of heroes and heroic stories. It is a recognition that the modern inclination towards mythical thinking has profoundly ideological implications. In ‘Subjective Portraits’ Akutagawa notes how:

> […] in times ancient and modern, heroes have employed masks to manipulate us and like cattle we have followed. (ARZ11:202)

He explains that we should not underestimate ostensibly frivolous characters like Jutarō and, by extension Momotarō, because they can be put to very potent political ends:

> It is true that I have looked down somewhat upon Iwami Jutarō. Jutarō is hardly a deep thinker, like one of the stalwarts of the National Essence Club (Kokusai kai). (ARZ11:200)

In this classic Akutagawan juxtaposition, the contrast with the "deep thinking" of the National Essence Club is heavily satirised and the writer's scorn for such movements is barely disguised. The *Dai-Nippon kokusai kai*, founded in 1919 and active until 1945 was a think tank dedicated to promoting Emperor worship and the national essence (Henry 2009, p.101). It is striking that Akutagawa chooses to link the two phenomena: an imaginatively constructed hero and a group dedicated to the construction of a heroic imagined community thereby showing how the seemingly innocuous can have profound ideological import. We have already noted Akutagawa's scathing description of the glorification of violence in the name of the state in 'A Dwarf's Words' in which he expands on the political imperative of the Yushukan, the Japanese military and war museum maintained by the Yasukuni Shrine first established in 1882 and conceived as a paean to imperial might and national spirit. It is clear that Akutagawa viewed such moves towards mythologisation with suspicion particularly mystification which characterised the modern age which, as we noted earlier, he viewed as a "festival of mysticism".

In making a convincing case for Akutagawa's move towards more entrenched political engagement after 1921, Henry (2009) describes how the writer's experiences in China were of particular importance (pp.99–105). Akutagawa appeared especially moved by the conviction of the Chinese nationalist anti-Manchu activist Zhang Taiyan (1868–1936) and his hatred of *Momotarō* as we have already seen in our treatment of 'Subjective Portraits'. Yet, according to Henry, Akutagawa was principally occupied by Zhang's desire to create an imagined national community. Zhang's revolutionary fervour was primarily concerned with the intensification of a sense of Han Chinese nationhood based in History and traced back to a mythical emperor (p.99). Keen to valorise those historical figures and heroes who could infiltrate the national consciousness and move the populace to support an uprising like the 1911 Revolution, the centrality of mythologisation to Zhang's thinking was clear to Akutagawa.

So it is in Akutagawa's 'The Peach Boy' that the narrator includes a cast of four legendary devil figures from an array of folk tales. Yet rather than being a cast of timeless champion daredevils who might move the reader to those raptures of nationalist pride perhaps envisaged by Zhang, they appear to be a rag-bag selection of less than noble confectionery-loving individuals. Hybridised as they are, the reader is almost bemused by their parodic simultaneity. It is precisely at this point of doubt and wonder that the narrator proceeds to question the veracity of the devil-island legend because of the apparently subjective account of its narration by the maidens who claimed to have been abducted. The narrator, who we had earlier doubted in his role as folkloric story-teller here seems to actively dispute his own story and positions himself firmly

within Taishō society: “just like we love Ginza”. The reader is led to believe that these legendary devils whom she has always believed to be fiendish have actually been defamed by unscrupulous slanderers. To trust this story is to accept that the devils from the tales of *Kobutori Jiisan*, *Issunboshi*, *Shuten Dōji* and *Iberaki Dōji* are all much less devilish than previous story-tellers have been wont to allege. The narrator even appears to associate the four with the Shitennō, the Buddhist Four Heavenly Kings, each of whom watches over one cardinal direction. To believe the presentation of the narrator is to be chastened in one’s trust of the written record. This same destabilising device would be used in Akutagawa’s rewriting of that classic tale of retribution, ‘The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab’ in which it is the crab rather than the monkey who is presented as the guilty party in a prejudicial trial that makes a mockery of justice.

In these ways the narrator not only makes a strong parallel between the pre-modern and the modern but also makes a more fundamentally modernist hermeneutical assertion about mimesis. In drawing attention to the fact that we cannot believe this legend because of the way in which it was reported, the journalist-narrator effectively undermines his own inclusion of the devil in *Kobu-tori Jiisan* and *Issun-bōshi* and thereby submits the entire *Momotarō* legend, and indeed the others alluded to, to doubt.

At this moment the narrator completely rewrites the ending of the tale with an objective confidence which is both reinforced and undermined by the realist posture of newspaper reportage, a device which will be revisited in our next chapter on ‘Horse Legs’. If we characterise the purpose of the action in the epic to be solely directed to the revelation and reinforcement of an already acknowledged truth then Akutagawa’s ‘The Peach Boy’ is certainly an anti-epic.

If the narrative approach of the novel is similarly to present a unified world which reflects and creates an imagined community with its reader then Akutagawa's 'The Peach Boy' must also be seen as anti-novelistic. In continuing the drama after the subjugation of the devils' island, Akutagawa disturbs the unity of the epic adventure while also allowing the protagonist a kind of emotional expression as he sighs: "It's so annoying that the devils are so deeply tenacious." (p.55) His fate is never resolved as the last word in the action is given to the independence plotters on the devils' island. The narration characteristically ends in limbo with no tidy novelistic conclusion, it appears as a kind of journalistic after-thought which requires the reader to look out for updates.

Postscript: How not to Conclude

Tacked on to this sentimentalised newspaper account of recent developments, the final section, typical of many of Akutagawa's works, takes the form of a parody of an interpretative postscript. The ending of 'Death of a Martyr', 1918) was one example of this type of generic parody that caused scandal as we discussed in our treatment of the postscript of 'The Ball'. We also saw in the appendix to 'The Ball' how Akutagawa changed his ending by having the narrator recount his recent meeting with the protagonist Akiko on a train in order to lend the story a playful air of reality which actually completely undermined it. In 'The Peach Boy' however, the ending appears as the exegetic conclusion the reader expects but, as in *Kappa* (1927) in which the protagonist is found to be

insane, it mystifies rather than clarifies. The story, by coming full circle to the peach tree in the heart of some universal mountain, unknown to humans, focuses not on the exploits of Momotarō but on his conception, both as a character and as a national myth. Mythical place/time is once more regained "in the heart of the mountain unknown to humans" but it collides awkwardly with real time as the tree: "still bears masses of fruit just as it did in the olden days." How this valley, seemingly unknown to humans has come to the attention of this fallible newspaper-reporter narrator is not explained and the remark appears spurious in its lofty ambition. Furthermore, the narrator finishes with a question thereby projecting the conclusion of the tale into the future, perhaps even ten thousand years into the future which the reader knows to be absurd. The cosmic-time version of 'The Peach Boy' simply will not conclude.

The divine conception of this unique national hero is utterly undermined by the knowledge that there are possibly other future geniuses still sleeping in the fruit kernel, waiting for the fateful crow to peck them so that they too might tumble to earth to perform their preordained adventures. If we are to see in the ending to 'The Peach Boy' an undermining of the providential imperative of national narratives and a nod to Nietzsche's idea of a genius or an *Übermensch*, we must conclude that 'The Peach Boy' as a national adventure has been a gross disappointment. If Akutagawa's purpose in writing 'The Peach Boy' was to expose the modern national adventure as fantasy, then he not only juxtaposes famous tales and histories in parodic stylisation but also uses temporal upheaval and narrative instability to achieve his polemical end. The confusion of epic, adventure, historical and cosmic time dialogises the *Momotarō* adventure, subverting its petrifaction as an official tale by exposing the way in which what

has been taken for granted is in fact historically and discursively produced. We note how Akutagawa playfully makes use of different generic time frames to relativise a hitherto univocal mimetic account while also possibly winking at the essentially conservative and normalising underpinning of the *watakushi shōsetsu* (I-novel) with its unified first-person narration.

If Akutagawa saw that the mystification of national history was an important tool in the process of intellectual and affective nationalisation strengthening during the 1910s and 20s, he also recognised that it was merely one among several. We shall see in our next chapter on 'Horse Legs' that there was, at the heart of modern mass culture, a use of narrative as a means to persuade, convert and conscript in order to create a national subjectivity. The popular press would be central in articulating and disseminating a sense of normative culture which Akutagawa reveals to be emasculating.

Chapter Four

Uma no ashi (*Horse Legs*, 1925): Delusion and Modernity

> The minute a woman becomes a wife, she is changed into the spirit of an obedient domestic animal. ('Chijou rakuen', ('Earthly Paradise'), 'A Dwarf's Words', ARZ13:47)

Throughout this study we return to the idea that it is through the skilful use of narrative that subjects are interpellated to positions from which they are drawn to think, feel and act in particular ways. Whether that narrative is performed at a national level through the stories told about a state's genesis and sacred mission or on a more personal level in a romantic story, the mechanics of communication remain the same.

Akutagawa saw that the most persuasive narratives are those which seem to have always existed. We have seen how he was intently interested in the application of History, a new academic discourse which used its empirical authority to create a very moral narrative of the national story. In our study of 'The Peach Boy', we saw how he deliberately draws attention to the confusion of story, history and myth which mirrored the infantilisation of the newly nationalised subject in the Japanese education system.

Akutagawa's understanding of the recourse to narrative by all political projects as well as the necessary but often occluded recourse to a range of narrative devices to convert the reading subject is evident in his entry 'Seijiteki tensai' ('Political Genius') in 'A Dwarf's Words':

> From time immemorial we have believed that the will of the people is the will of political genius. Yet it is actually the complete opposite. Rather, it is the will of political genius which is the will of the people. Or at least it is believed to be the will of the people. That's why political genius is always accompanied by dramatic genius. Napoleon said: 'From the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step'. These are less the words of an emperor than the words of an actor. (ARZ13:50–51)

Fascinated by Napoleon's convincing imperial performance, Akutagawa was keen to understand how the acts of other "manufactured heroes" and regimes came to be believed. In our next chapter we aim to look at the ways in which a convincing and converting mimesis can be seen in such diverse areas as journalism and scientific discourse.

"Culture" and the Popular Press

If Akutagawa saw that the mythologisation of History was an important device in the process of intellectual and affective nationalisation strengthening during the 1910s and 20s, he also recognised that it was merely one among several, including advertising and the popular press. 'Green Onions', a satire of a hack's trite story of a sentimental waitress who reads the world through her magazine and novelistic heroes is a poignant sketch of the influence of "culture" and advertising on the masses as well as the economic exigencies of writing for the popular press. Albeit with a very different kind of protagonist, we saw how 'The Ball' no less effectively reveals the influence of artistic and literary culture on the middle classes. Both stories return to the very human need to narrativise and

romanticise the self and the world around us. Both individually and collectively, the romantic imagination is key to the process of self-identification and the identification of our interlocutors. Ours is not a rational, empirical appreciation of the world but rather an emotional, imaginative and often narcissistic one which draws heavily on fiction and fictional types to frame our understanding. In this process, notions of culture, our own national culture and that which we believe characterises others, are fundamentally the reification of shared fantasies understood as stories. 'The Ball' is, if nothing else, a strident remark on the forcefulness of artistic and cultural *idées reçues* on national and sexual subjectivities.

At the heart of the modern, increasingly massified culture was, then, the use of narrative as a means to persuade, convert and conscript be it in literature, and especially the novel in creating a national subjectivity, the increasingly popular press or in History in its role of national state-building. In recognising the ideological import of narrative, Akutagawa's was a very modern position for it acknowledged not only the self-conscious discursiveness of all narrative form which we may characterise as modernist but it also underlined the ideological ends to which such forms could be put and was therefore part of an approach which saw culture as part of a wider ideological apparatus.

Bayard-Sakai, in her astute analysis of the radical increase in publication and press censorship in the 1920s makes the obvious yet no less striking point that censors started from the idea that Literature has an effect on reality and that indoctrination also occurs in what is discouraged or disallowed. Censorship encourages self-regulation (Suzuki 2012, p.108) and as we shall see in our study of 'Horse Legs', a powerful self-censoring weapon of any regime is public

morality, policed in part by the popular press. To direct public morality is to direct the course of the nation. Akutagawa was only too aware of this truth when he wrote his entries on 'Shūbun' ('Scandal'), 'Yoron' ('Public Opinion'), 'Sange' ('Repentance') and 'Jū' ('Liberty') in 'A Dwarf's Words'. Wondering why the public were so keen on scandal, Akutagawa found that they looked to justify their own cowardice but also found a pedestal from which their own superiority could be assured: "then they sleep as happily as pigs" (ARZ13:53). He went on to note the grim force of public opinion, remarking that it: "is always a lynching and a lynching is always amusing even if you swap the pistol for the newspaper article" (ARZ13:54). If the modern world would not exist without a popular press, then its function as regulator of public morality was evident to Akutagawa: "The Ancients used to repent before God. People nowadays repent before society." ('Sange', 'Repentance', ARZ16:73) The implications for personal liberty were important: "there are so many restrictions on our so-called liberty, namely God, morals or possibly social customs, collective responsibility." (ARZ13:92)

For such modern myths, fictions and ideological positions to hold sway, the prerequisite attitude is that of obedience. In 'A Dwarf's Words', Akutagawa discusses in the entry on 'Bōaku' ('Violence') the use of brute force in a society, noting that political power is nothing but patented violence. Yet for an ideology to be successful in the long term, affective conditioning rather than force is crucial. So it is that Akutagawa writes that to believe wholeheartedly in a myth is to be obedient to it. What his hero Montaigne (1533–1592) had taught him was that to obey unconditionally is to be unconditionally uncritical. The French sixteenth-century statesman, essayist and critic believed that the correct approach to mythologising was scepticism. Similarly, in Akutagawa's entries on

'Kaigishugi' ('Scepticism') and '*Dorei*' ('Slavery') we see that a philosophy based on doubt, a critical approach to the given world can be emancipatory:

> To abolish slavery is to abolish the self-consciousness of slavery in those who are slaves. Without slaves it would be difficult to guarantee the safety of our society. (ARZ13:56)

This is a very forceful articulation of Akutagawa's emphasis on the importance of a critical mind in the modern age. By drawing attention to the ways in which competing ideologies have recourse to powerful stories in order to conscript the reading subject, he urges us to be free of their affective force.

Realism and Science: Creating the Truth Effect

> The essence of writing is to prevent any reply to the question: who is speaking? (Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, 1970, p.134)

> Truth happens to an idea. (William James, *Pragmatism*, 2000 [1907], p.88)

Let us now turn our attentions to a different aspect of the power of narrative. The new vogue for science, perception and psychoanalysis may be seen to embody many of the ambivalences which characterised ways of apprehending the world in the 1920s. The trend for popular science in middle-class journals could be seen in the vogue for all things Einstein following the physicist's visit to Japan in 1922. The certainties of science seemed to be recast as Einstein's

new theory of relativity shocked reading audiences both learned and popular and entered the realm of general philosophical discussion (Golley 2008, p.24).

The popularisation of science was a trend in which Akutagawa took a keen interest and he read widely scientific, spiritual, philosophical and psychological works including those by Henri Bergson (1859–1941), Samuel Butler (1835–1902), Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) and William James (1842–1910)[103]. Akutagawa saw that this new scientific bent could still be as subjective and as moralistic as any arts or humanities writing and often aimed to rationalise and direct the national psyche by its claim to knowledge. Since one man's belief may be another man's delusion, Akutagawa saw that it was not the myth itself that was important but the power of the written word in creating and sustaining its force communally. Remarking for example in 'A Dwarf's Words' on the vogue for science following the popularity of Darwin from the 1880s and Einstein following his tour to Japan in 1922, Akutagawa questioned the myth of progress as a question of narrative persuasiveness rather than inherent truth. We noted in our introduction that for Akutagawa, belief, be it rational, spiritual or superstitious, is nothing more than a question of faith: each position as specious and subjective as the next.

The 1920s were a time when the subjective nature of sensory experience looked set to disarm the notion of objectivity even as it collided with what Golley calls "the imagined contours of objective totality, a reality that exists beyond the senses" (2008, p.3). The *Shinkankaku-ha* or New Sensationists' idea of the "Fourth Person" may be an eloquent summation of the ardent desire for a

[103] Akutagawa's personal library contains works such as Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics* 1913; nine works by Samuel Butler including *Unconscious Memory*, 1920; Schopenhauer's 1918 work *On Human Nature*; William James' 1909 *The Meaning of Truth: a Sequel to Pragmatism*.

visionary epistemology which was at once subjective *and* objective but one which was never quite successful (Fowler 1988, p.53). What was certain was that it could no longer be merely a question of representation but had to also be a question of subjective perception that was part of a broader epistemological and ontological crisis. This was a question which had always fascinated Akutagawa but, unlike the New Sensationists, he did not seek an integrative whole as his later works just as well as his early works surely testify.[104] In 'Horse Legs' we will see how not only representation but more fundamentally perception is brought into question, creating an ultimately inconclusive narrative in which the protagonist may well be insane, the third-person narrator abdicates all responsibility and the scathing newspaper reporter seems to have the last word but in an obvious Biercean satire of middle-class morality.

'Horse Legs' is the story of a Japanese, Hanzaburō, who died suddenly one day and was revived in a clerical waiting room. When the officials realise that they have the wrong man, they attempt to send Hanzaburō back to life but have to replace his rotting legs with horse legs. What follows is the story of automatic response and Hanzaburō's struggle to resist the call of the wild narrated by a narrator who questions Hanzaburō's clarity of mind. It was written at a time when a range of writers familiar to Akutagawa were exploring ideas of affective memory and automatic responses. The antirealist philosopher Georges Sorel (1847–1922) for example and perhaps more famously Proust (1871–1922) were developing in exciting new ways the ideas of writers like Bergson, hugely admired by Akutagawa. Sorel (and, incidentally, his pupil Mussolini) would be

[104] The shinkankakuha school of New Sensationists looked to an autotelic reading of the world and saw writing as an act of transcendence.

quick to point out the ideological implications of Bergson's notions of affective memory and automatic responses. Sorel was concerned about morality in History and other forms of apparently empirical discourse concealed by an objective style. He also saw that such morality, often instilled during childhood takes a very abstract but powerful hold over us so that it becomes automatic. To tap into such automatic responses and affective memories could be a tremendously powerful and potentially perilous tool (Gianinazzi 2006, p.19).

'Horse Legs' lends itself to a very fruitful investigation of many seemingly diverse but ultimately very complementary themes I want to explore in this chapter. The physical, the medical and the psychiatric comically then tragically converge with a very middle-class notion of acceptable and unacceptable social behaviour to reveal a character whose fear of being labelled insane forces him to expel himself from society.

This is a world in which the line between what is normal and what is freakish is unequivocal and utterly uncompromising, policed not only by the characters themselves to their own detriment but also by the omnipresent popular press whose sanctimonious pronouncements form the unforgiving social conscience which keeps society in check. It is also a world in which success is equated with the accumulation of commodities in semi-colonial China and in this satire of global capitalism the protagonist literally works like a beast to acquire all the trappings of the modern, progressive, cultured life only to find himself in a state of dire unhappiness and absolute angst. As ever this is a playful narrative but one which on closer reading will reveal more sinister forces at work controlling and directing the psyche of the Modern Japanese subject.

An Everyday Tragedy of Modern Life

> "...if you are not like everybody else, then you are abnormal, if you are abnormal, then you are sick. These three categories, not being like everybody else, not being normal and being sick are in fact very different but have been reduced to the same thing." (Michel Foucault, 2004 [1975], p.95)

'Horse Legs' is the bizarre story of an ordinary man who tries to embody, to the point of tragic absurdity, the banal yet uncompromising ideal of modern man enslaved under imperial capitalism. Its hapless protagonist Hanzaburō, an ordinary thirty-something married man, employee of the Mitsubishi Conglomerate in Beijing, aspiring to the Cultured Life, finds that his will is not his own when he dies suddenly at his desk and awakes to find himself in the hands of an incompetent yet all-powerful administrative system. Three days later the Chinese modern-day purgatory officials realise they have made a monstrous clerical error: in a tragi-comic gesture of globalisation, they were supposed to have taken the American Henry Barrett. Their attempts to send Hanzaburō back to life are thwarted by the fact that his legs have by now rotted away up to his thighs. Aware that this managerial blunder could have calamitous consequences for the department, the officials are quick to find a cover-up solution. Paralysed by his rotten legs, Hanzaburō can do nothing to oppose his enforced incorporation of the legs of a recently deceased horse from the Desheng Menwai district of Beijing.

The absurdity of the bureaucratic decision taken hastily to avoid middle-management embarrassment is the beginning of Hanzaburō's tragic demise. While his physical ability to perform his modern social role as husband and

employee is literally truncated and grotesquely sabotaged by a mercilessly inflexible bureaucratic apparatus, his desire to do so remains stronger than ever and poor Hanzaburō tries doggedly to lead his normal, uneventful life, now in a state of permanently heightened anxiety that his colleagues or wife will uncover his freakish abnormality. As we read his diary entries, we learn of Hanzaburō's determined attempts to control his wild equine legs, overcome the bane of flea bites, surreptitiously come up with the cash to replace his fast perishing socks as well as his attempts to persuade his wife of the need to be rid of the tatami room (a horror for horse hooves) and adopt a modern western lifestyle.

Yet just as the stoical Hanzaburō appears to be coping admirably well, his utter powerlessness at the faceless forces controlling his life is made clear as "destiny was still preparing its final blow" (ARZ12:93). At the end of March, his horse legs suddenly began to dance and leap quite uncontrollably, presumably, as the narrator explains, in automatic response to the arrival of Mongolian air which caused the horses to become frantic to mate. No longer able to conceal his secret from his wife Tsuneko, he makes one final doomed attempt to conquer his abnormality and begs to be restrained. Fearing her husband is going mad, the dutiful Tsuneko does as she is told but to no avail: Hanzaburō can no longer resist the call of the wild and breaks free from his shackles, whinnying his way into the yellow Mongolian dust[105].

[105] For an intriguing explanation of the importance of Mongolian horses to the Japanese colonial project, see Boyd, 2010. Boyd explains that the Japanese military promoted the use of Mongolian horses in the late 1920s because they were more docile and hardy than either their Japanese or European counterparts and there was a shortage of suitable horses in Japan. The promotion presented Mongolia and its horses as integral to the Japanese empire which had indisputable rights to extraterritorial privileges in the region. The horses were essential in protecting Japanese rights and interests and their sacrifice enabled a spiritual glorification of this already romanticised land (2010,

Six months later, a ragged Hanzaburō returns to reveal his secret and be reunited with his wife, but, confronted by her barely repressed revulsion, he turns and flees, never to be seen again. Subsequently convinced of the truth of her husband's diaries, Tsuneko is afterwards feared to be suffering from delusional hallucinations and faces an uncertain future.

A tragedy of modern life, 'Horse Legs' reveals not only the alienation and brutalisation of the individual under imperial capitalism but also how modern systems of mass culture penetrate every fabric of quotidian life to coerce individuals into conventional modes of behaviour through often masochistic auto-regulation. We see in this tale how the discourse of physical and psychological normalcy and its obverse, freakishness and madness were being harnessed in the early twentieth century to police acceptable social conduct. The horror of physical and mental nonconformity which runs through the story is also an index of the ways in which the vogue for science in its popular manifestations as modernology, psychology, mental pathology, criminology and notions of sexual deviance were used ideologically to categorise legitimate behaviour and shape the individual to the requirements of institutional power. In this tale which hovers between the fantastic and the banal, the deluded and the rational, the criminal and the legitimate, I aim to show how Akutagawa crafts a powerful satire of modern life which questions the discourses of knowledge upon which the categories of normal and abnormal behaviour are based and which appear scientifically unopposable. Such a vision of rational modernity is

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pp.27–28). May we perceive a winking at such miscegenation and eugenics in the national interest in 'Horse Legs'?

shot to pieces and the noxious naturalisation of social norms is revealed. This system of culture, ideological and administrative, destroys the individual and sacrifices him to the social apparatus which has come to regulate every part of his being, even to the core of his unconscious which was becoming fair game, as Akutagawa saw it, in the increasingly fascistic endeavour to manage the masses. 'Horse Legs' is a tragicomic vision of modern man's absurd struggle to conform to furious social expectations and whose recognition of his utter helplessness is inevitably accompanied by shame, pillory and forced withdrawal.

Fuan (Anxiety)

In many ways 'Horse Legs' is about the sense of anxiety rife among modern consumers. In his compelling treatment of the late 1920s' Japanese notion of *fuan* (anxiety), Fujii Takashi draws on the vogue for Shestovian nihilism and Japsperian angst to explain the shift in outlook of the early Shōwa period as the existential outcome of rapid political, economic, social and cultural change (2010, pp.5–11). Shestov's 1905 *All Things are Possible* (the 1920 edition of which forms part of Akutagawa's private library) held that since life is deeply paradoxical and not comprehensible through logic it leads to the experience of despair. Though it appeared six years after the publication of 'Horse Legs' and four years after Akutagawa's suicide committed on the grounds of a sense of "vague uneasiness" (*bonyaritoshita fuan*), Jaspers' 1931 *The Spiritual Condition of the Age* was described in Japan as indicative of the contemporary decay of faith in reason and of the dilemma of capitalist monopolies (Fujii 2010, p.7). If one had come to doubt by the 1920s the socialist utopias of William Morris and Tolstoy, the aesthetic aristocratic havens of Nietzsche, or the saving grace of

Marx's proletariat and Kropotkin's restorative revolution, then it became increasingly popular, if not fashionable, to side with the likes of Shestov and Jaspers. Their nihilistic musings made clear modern man's powerlessness to change or escape the system to which he was enslaved and recognise that his consequently absurd continuation of purposeless toil must needs be followed by madness or death. This *fuan no tetsugaku* (philosophy of despair) came to characterise the early Shōwa not only in scholarly circles epitomised perhaps by Heidegger's reception in Japan in 1935 but also became a modish development in which the reaction to Akutagawa's suicide in 1927 has to be understood (Fujii 2010, p.7).

This view of modern man's isolation from himself, his work and his peers is fully articulated in Hanzaburō's literal alienation from his own physical body and then later, as the repressed "wild within" resurfaced with the arrival of spring, from his own consciousness as well. Contemporaries such as Shestov, Jaspers and later the Frankfurt School asserted that decisions about the individual are taken by hierarchies ranging from employers to the national administration and, in the private sphere, by the system of mass culture which "takes over the last inward impulses of individuals who are forced to consume what is offered to them" and relies on the mechanism of inner censorship which accepts these dictates as second nature (Adorno and Horkheimer 1969 [1947], p.203).

This central tenet of auto-regulation is one which was exercising psychoanalysts and those thinkers applying the subliminal vogue[106] to mass

[106] For the popularisation of psychology and psychotherapy in Japan, see Harding, C.G., Iwata F., and Yoshinaga, S. (eds), *Religion and Psychotherapy in Modern Japan* (Routledge, 2014).

movements, advertising and propaganda. Freud's *The Future of an Illusion* (2008 [1917]), affords similarly fruitful conclusions. Freud saw that as destructive antisocial and anticultural tendencies are present in all humans, the most effective development in mass control has been the shift to the mental because it is only through psychological coercion that cultural institutions can be upheld. Culture, being something which is imposed on a reluctant majority by a minority which has managed to gain possession of the instruments of power is ultimately coercive and coercion is only arrived at through the universal obligation to work and renunciation of natural drives. According to Freud, it has been the role of religion to prepare us for this resignation (2008, pp.4–8).

Akutagawa engaged with the contemporary sense of social and moral crisis as revealed in the popular press and in various newly popularised academic discourses. This sense of crisis was ostensibly brought about by the advent of industrial capitalism and its malignant spectre, the masses. Such a perceived heightened tension between the individual and society was, I will argue, compounded by the radical socialisation of the individual as consumer and the ideology underpinning it, expressed and sustained by middle-class normativity. Harnessing the popular vogue for the subliminal and the psychological which characterised the period from 1907 in many ways enabled and helped to support authoritarian political and social forces that strongly advocated ideological fantasies of cultural harmony, ethnic purity and a clear demarcation of gender roles (Reichert 2009, p.355).

Tensor Posadas has shown how increased crime rates in Tokyo due to huge population rises following the First World War led the police to develop

new techniques and technologies to facilitate “procedures of individuation and the fixity of identities” (2010, pp.58–9, quoted in Dodd, 2014, p.124). A higher degree of surveillance within society from the late 1910s compounded the drive to treat deviance as a pathological condition to be isolated or obliterated. This social and political compulsion to assimilate, dominate or destroy outlooks deemed incompatible with national interests and cultural hegemony (Reichert 2009, p.356) and was a concern of which Akutagawa, in both his own reading and in his criticism, was extremely aware.

Akutagawa read extensively works on the so-called modern condition, fear of the masses, civilisation, madness, psychopathology and delusion. For instance his library contains a copy of Charles Mackay’s *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* (1892), a pioneering work in social psychology and psychopathology which showed how individual subjectivities could be based on national and philosophical delusions. Akutagawa read widely works literary, scientific and philosophical treating consciousness and its application to popular opinion, propaganda and social control. He owned for instance a copy of Max Stirner’s forceful *The Ego and his Own* (1913) which is the logical continuation of Mackay’s idea of imagined communities being bound by common delusions and goes further by calling these *idées fixes* instances of shared lunacy. His section entitled ‘Wheels in the Head’ which may call to mind Akutagawa’s unsettling story of paranoia and the uncanny, ‘Cogwheels’ describes modern man as in a madhouse, deluded by fixed ideas and incarcerated as insane if he questions their validity:

> Man, your head is haunted; you have wheels in your head! […] as authors fill whole folios on the State without calling into

> question the fixed idea of the State itself; […] Undislodgeable, like a madman's delusion, those thoughts stand on a firm footing, and he who doubts them – lays hands on the *sacred*! (1913, pp.45–47)

Profoundly interested in questions of philosophy and faith, Akutagawa always returns to larger ontological and epistemological questions enlivened by contemporary thought on perception and consciousness.[107] For instance his library contains a copy of William James's *The Meaning of Truth* (1907) which argues for a radical empiricism in regard to belief, a pragmatic rather than a believer's faith which desacralises and sees religious belief for what he saw it to mean: an expedient moral holiday. He also owned copies of Henri Bergson's *Time and Free Will: an Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1912) and *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1913) in which Bergson laid out his influential ideas that sensory experience, feeling and intuition could be more important than rationalism and science in understanding reality. Samuel Butler's *Unconscious Memory* (1920), also in Akutagawa's collection, was part of this scientific and psychological movement which tried to work out how the unconscious could unwittingly steer our actions. Butler's *Life and Habit* (1916), and *Evolution*, *Old and New* (1921), of which the writer also had copies, attempted to apply new ideas about the unconscious and the intuitive to notions of Darwinian evolution, ideas which resonate strongly in *Horse Legs*. Akutagawa would be quick to point out the sinister developments in modern

[107] The febrile grey area between religious faith and delusion may be seen in such works as 'An Enlightenment Murder' 1918, 'Juria no kichisuke' ('The Life of a Holy Fool') 1919, 'Nankin no kirisuto' ('The Christ of Nanking') 1920 as we shall see in the final chapter on 'The Man from the West'.

science and its social application of which this is a grotesque and tragic example. I hope that by focusing our attention on thematic and structural elements of this magical-realist story, we may arrive at a better understanding of what it meant to be Japanese in the 1920s.

Unconscious Memory and Delusional Narratives: A Crisis of Perception

> The hero of this story is a man named Oshino Hanzaburō. He was nobody special, I am sorry to say – just a thirtyish employee in the Beijing office of the Mitsubishi Conglomerate. (ARZ12:83–4, translated by Rubin 2006, p.130)

This exposition of the quintessentially ordinary hero by an authoritative yet apologetic narrator sets out both the banality of Hanzaburō's humdrum existence and his unthinking obedience to social expectation. Hanzaburō moved to Beijing two months after his graduation from a Tokyo commercial college. His reputation among his colleagues and superiors was neither especially good, but nor was it bad. Hanzaburō was just as ordinary as the way he dressed or as his home life. Two years earlier, Hanzaburō had married a respectable young woman called Tsuneko whose spiritual and sexual compatibility is not explored. Hanzaburō and his wife's home life was ordinary in the extreme and revolved around process and consumption: eating their meals, listening to their gramophone and going to the moving pictures.

The narrator's cursory yet comprehensive summary of Hanzaburō's education, occupation, domestic situation and leisure pursuits, a tick list of social acceptability, indicates an unexceptional and mindlessly obedient man who has come to terms quite without effort and indeed without thinking with what is demanded of him. Displaying a dull and unreflective mind-set borne of a technical education, a willingness to undertake a productive yet unexciting commercial occupation, a sensible reining in of romantic and sexual desire within the boundaries of respectability and an untroubled consumption of the mass-cultural products of the day, Hanzaburō appears to be an archetypal modern consumer rather than a noble protagonist. Yet that he has actively chosen such a straightforward, respectable life is undermined by the narrator whose speedy, apologetic survey of his pedestrian achievements implies that not only could this be anyone but that his choices are as necessarily limited by the dictates of social decorum as surely as destiny decides his fate: "Their ordinary life, however, was no more immune to the workings of destiny than anyone else's." So utterly bereft of agency is our unfortunate everyman protagonist that "with a single blow one mid-afternoon, destiny shattered the monotony of this supremely ordinary life" (ARZ12:84): he suffered a stroke and died on the spot. As if to make up for his truly disappointing death, the narrator makes the apposite remark that: "society rarely offers critical comment regarding the way a person dies. The way a person lives is what evokes criticism" (ARZ12:84). In this way we understand that the pathway which Hanzaburō had seemingly chosen had already been determined by the mandate of social convention which appears coterminous with destiny itself. To

have chosen any other route would have met with almost certain social opprobrium.

The journalistic, investigative style of the narrator with its constant recourse to eye-witness accounts as well as the reports in the moralistic *Shuntian Times*, the popular local newspaper which interjects to cast judgement on all the events, creates the impression that Hanzaburō, as an exemplary citizen, faces constant public scrutiny which he has internalised. Yet the obvious narrative lacunae, contradictions and conjecture ultimately subvert the authority that such a style ordinarily generates to draw attention to the fact that such ostensibly empirical judgments are entirely subjective just as they privilege the problematic nature of perception. Both thematically and textually, 'Horse Legs' is a sharp but ultimately inconclusive commentary on the often unclear boundary between perception and reality, delusion and sanity. A closer reading of Akutagawa's narrative technique in this story will afford us opportunities to experience ontological and epistemological conundrums which lead us to question the apparently rational basis on which our understanding of the modern world appears to be founded. This narrative technique might be seen as the aesthetic articulation of other dominant contemporary psychological, scientific and intellectual modes of thinking in which Akutagawa showed a keen interest. We shall see how the themes and narrative functions of delusion, abnormality and freakishness recur in Akutagawa's work and go beyond the literary to wider social and cultural questions.

The first narrative shift which brilliantly unsettles the reader from the comfort of the ordinary to the disquiet of the extraordinary takes place immediately

following Hanzaburō's sudden death but without in the least interrupting the reportage style:

> According to the diagnosis of Dr Yamai, director of the Universalist Hospital, Hanzaburō died of a cerebral haemorrhage. Hanzaburō himself, however, did not believe he had suffered a cerebral haemorrhage. Neither did he believe that he was dead. It did come as a surprise to him, though, to find himself standing in a strange office. (ARZ12:84–5, translated by Rubin 2006, p.131)

The classic Realist style of the third-person omniscient narrator who, like a plausible reporter, corroborates his facts by recourse to expert testimony and witness account, is at once substantiated and radically undermined by the inclusion of the perspective of the deceased Hanzaburō. While his first-hand account gives credence to the story, the reader knows that the authority and indeed the sanity of the narrator should be questioned because ordinarily, dead people's opinions are not voiced in Realist narratives nor are narrators who give voice to them to be believed[108]. Yet it is precisely the objective, omnipresent style with which the reality of Hanzaburō's predicament is described that allows it to appear perfectly normal and credible. He comes to in the office of two nameless Chinese officials and rather than explaining to the surprised reader the circumstances and location of this strange occurrence, the narrator sketches the confusion of the protagonist and apparently complete composure:

[108] Of course, this device was more famously employed in Akutagawa's 1921 work 'In a Bamboo Grove' in which the murdered man's spirit is called to the defence as voiced through a medium.

> Hanzaburō was shocked again. First of all, according to what these two Chinese men were saying to each other, he was dead. Secondly, three days had gone by since his death. And thirdly, his legs were rotting. He knew this was ridiculous, though because his legs were perfectly – He looked down and screamed. (ARZ12:86, translated by Rubin 2006, p.132)

At this absurd hiatus, the narrator goes so far as to include the kind of incidental detail that gives the reader confidence in his account while seeming utterly out of place: “A breeze gently stirred the curtains in the sunlit window.” (ARZ12:85) So it is that this sudden shift from the monotony of Hanzaburō’s exemplary life to the fantastical bureau of the recently deceased is rendered credible by the direct speech, calm detail and Realist tone of the narrator who appears merely to set out the facts as they occurred before his very eyes. Yet such an opposition is classically defamiliarising and renders what had previously appeared normal and automatic as uncanny and strange and so we are drawn to question many of the premises on which our initial judgments were based. We become conscious of what we are supposed to accept unconsciously and it is ironically the narrator’s calm, reasonable voice which makes us suspicious. Visual details remind us that we are experiencing the scene through the eyes of the narrator whose perception we now call into question even as his tone is assured and rational:

> On either side of the large desk at the centre of the office two Chinese men, dressed in white ceremonial robes of the recently overthrown Qing dynasty, were examining ledgers. One of the men seemed to be about twenty years old. The

other had a long moustache that was beginning to yellow. (ARZ12:85, translated by Rubin 2006, p.131)

This is not the obvious descent into insanity of Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*, but the calm, objective manner of a narrator who merely records what unfurls before him rather as the narrator in *The Overcoat*[109]. Yet the reader feels uncertain because how he has been transported with our protagonist to this waiting room for the dead is not explained but merely presented as a given to which the subsequent reported speech appears to afford credence. Similarly, any pretentions to omniscience are undone in the reader's mind by the narrator's obvious elision of details of Hanzaburō's resurrection which remains entirely baffling. Furthermore, it is precisely at this point that the narrator reveals that he is not actually observing events first hand but rather from Hanzaburō's memory. In fact from this point, he reports entirely from second-hand sources, namely newspaper articles, diary entries and eye witness accounts and so we come to question the very plausibility of the tale.

Whether Hanzaburō actually had horse legs or merely suffered from a delusion that he did is a question which is never resolved. It is precisely this equivocation maintained by a journalistic style which hovers between empirical research, hearsay and guesswork that maintains the tension in the story. If the objective Realist style, in the first part at least, dissuades the reader from doubting the veracity of the fantastical events, it is only in the second part that we are we led to question whether the whole horse legs saga is actually a delusion of poor Hanzaburō's. As the omniscient style is undermined even

[109] Akutagawa owned copies of Gogol's short stories including *The Mantle*.

when the forced imposition of horse legs is credibly reported, we begin to be suspicious of events. It is at this point that the narrator begins to admit his incomplete mastery of the facts. Rather than relying on his direct observation of events, he confesses an overreliance on Hanzaburō's patchy memory so we start to wonder whether we can trust the hitherto entirely credible report. In this way the narrator turns from an omniscient scribe to a kind of detective, piecing together clues from the evidence before him:

> This was all Hanzaburō remembered – or at least, all he remembered with the same clarity as the events to that point. He seemed to recall arguing with the two Chinese men. Then he seemed to recall falling down a steep stairway. He could not be sure about either of those memories. In any case, when he regained consciousness after wandering through some kind of strange vision, he was lying in a coffin in his company-owned house in XX Lane. (ARZ12:89, translated by Rubin 2006, p.134)[110]

Narration then shifts between journalistic coverage, diary entries, sympathetic reporting of Hanzaburō's inner anguish, supposition, hearsay, narrative and sequential lacunae and hints of delusion yet all in a decidedly analytical tone. Hanzaburō's sensational resurrection is eagerly reported in The *Shuntian Times* but its rational plausability is undercut when Doctor Yamai explains that the weird phenomenon was "a mystery of nature that transcended the powers of medicine" (ARZ12:89, translated by Rubin 2006, p.134). Rather than knowing

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[110] Such a macabre theme was in fact a trope of modern fiction as seen for instance in Edgar Allan Poe's *A Premature Burial*, 1844 or Zola's *La mort d'Olivier Bécaille*, 1911.

his heart implicitly, the narrator analyses Hanzaburō's mental state through a close reading of his diary entries which he quotes in full: "if we examine his diary, we find that he was continually struggling with some threat" (ARZ12:90, translated by Rubin 2006, p.135). We might read the tone of these entries as calm and rational as befits a normal man trying to go about his business or as that of a delusional man utterly in the grip of his paranoia:

> September – Controlling horse legs is a lot harder than horse-back riding itself. Had a rush job before noon today, trotted down the stairway. Like anyone at a time like this, I was only thinking about the job, forgot about my horse legs. Next thing I know, my hoof goes straight through the seventh step. (ARZ12:91, translated by Rubin 2006, p.135)

Whether, as readers, we believe the subsequently undermined eye-witness account of the narrator who, despite certain unexplained phenomena, purports initially to have observed the very real physical change in Hanzaburō or whether we believe that Hanzaburō was actually insane and the narrator unreliable is the tension which holds the story together. The seeming certainty (to Hanzaburō at least) of the metamorphosis creates one of the main impressions of the story: that, following Jaspers' (1883–1969) ground-breaking work *General Psychopathology* of 1913, delusions, however fantastic, have the same emotional and physical certainty to the deluded as conviction. Indeed, the defining feature of delusion is that it is held with absolute conviction but that it is implausible or patently untrue. Jaspers holds that delusions are symptomatic of some kind of shift in the structure of experience and therefore one's sense of reality (Ratcliffe 2013, p.6). Importantly, the experience within which delusion

takes place is that of feeling that something is real and it is this perceptual experience rather than a mere belief that shapes a sense of what is real and unreal. On this view, it is our experiential grasp of reality which is more important than our thoughts about reality and this is the reason why empathetic experience reaches its limit because in order to understand the delusion, it is necessary to understand the experience in which it is embedded (Ratcliffe 2013, p.4).

There are several questions which remain unresolved and which unsettle the reader: did Hanzaburō really adopt horse legs or not? Was it the narrator's empathy with Hanzaburō's experience of physical conversion which meant that he could not disbelieve his testimony or was the narrator himself delusional? Delusion, paranoia and the uncanny were themes to which Akutagawa returned, most famously in 'Cogwheels', often viewed as evidence of the writer's own disintegrating psyche[111] but written with such lucidity and artistic acuity that we wonder whether this might be a reading from the telos of his suicide rather than appreciating what is a supremely well-crafted story which attempts to articulate the experience of paranoia rather than being symptomatic of it. In this work, it is through the artistically constructed loss of vital contact with reality and through the mediation of delusions and hallucinations that Akutagawa undertakes a stripping away of the normal, affective or cultural association of objects and invests them with new and uncanny meanings. Indeed we might suggest that the dysfunctional alienation from the self which is at the heart of 'Horse Legs' is taken to its delusional and hyper-reflexive conclusion in 'Cogwheels' in its

[111] See for instance Seiji Lippit's seminal chapter 'Disintegrating Mechanisms of Subjectivity: Akutagawa's Last Writings' in *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* 2002*,* pp.37–73.

removal of the perspective of the rational narrative frame and the embracing of a complete collapse of perspective.

If, as Jaspers maintains, beliefs originate against the backdrop of a shared social world, then it is the sense of belonging to a public world on which one's perspective is contingent which is integral to a sense of reality. In delusional atmospheres, socially accepted reality totters and people become adrift as is the case in 'Horse Legs' and 'Cogwheels'. Delusional atmospheres involve at least a partial loss of consensus reality, an erosion of the distinction between what is part of the public world and what is imagined by the individual. It is a reality no longer anchored in a public world (Ratcliffe 2013, p.10) but rather fixed to a distorted private narrative. Hanzaburō is acutely aware that he may not share his abnormality, deluded or otherwise, with the people around him and so he does everything in his power to conceal it and eventually exiles himself from society altogether.

The narrator's desire for us to regard the confession of a possibly deluded man with the same circumspection as the judgements of leading academic and scientific authorities suddenly appears comical. By endowing a fantastical testimony with intellectual parity, the narrator reminds us that to have faith in such ultimately subjective voices of apparent reason may also appear ludicrous. This is an archetypally Akutagawan masterstroke with which the narrator swiftly and obliquely comes to doubt all perspectives and authority in the story and his claim to empirical truth is revealed to be just as shaky as the bigoted verdicts of the *Shuntian Times*. Might Hanzaburō have succumbed to a pathological delusion due to the strain of constantly having to perform his impossible role in society and did he really trot disconsolately out of the public

eye so as not to bring shame on himself, his colleagues and his family? Had he so internalised the set of norms that came to affect all areas of people's lives that he would rather sacrifice himself for the greater good of society than attempt to live within it as a freak? May we see the demands of modern culture as totalitarian? These are the questions which Akutagawa tantalisingly raises but does not resolve.

Mental Health and National Hygiene

In his discussion of the broader social and political significance of tuberculosis and other culturally-loaded illnesses in Taishō, Dodd draws on Bourdagh's attention to the way in which a general anxiety to exclude the "diseased" part from the national body led to a set of internalised norms of hygiene: medical, social and political. Bourdagh writes that:

> These norms led to the incorporation of national policy directly into individual human bodies. Furthermore, as hygiene shifted the focus of medicine from curing disease in individual patients to preventing disease in society as a whole, it expanded the role of medicine beyond the treatment of disease to include the monitoring and regulation of healthy persons as well. (Bourdaghs 2003, p.51, quoted in Dodd 2014, p.8)

If the self-imposed quarantine of the untouchable *burakumin* protagonist Ushimatsu in Shimazaki Tōson's *Hakai* (*The Broken Commandment*, 1906) proves his status as a loyal national subject by reaffirming the healthy condition

of the wider Japanese body politic (Dodd 2014, p.15), is Hanzaburō's self-banishment a similarly faithful manoeuvre in his recognition of madness, subsequently reported by The *Shuntian Times* as "his rash crime of having gone mad" (ARZ12:98, translated by Rubin 2006, p.141)? Either way the confused reader is left to feel that being subjected to an authority which forces us to adopt horse legs would be just as horrific or as debilitating as suffering such a delusion in the first place.

Hanzaburō's rational tone is mirrored by the narrator who wonders why, near the end of March, Hanzaburō's horse legs started to dance and leap uncontrollably. He takes time to describe various plausible reasons but ultimately has to make a subjective decision based on the evidence he has to hand:

> Why, at this time, should his horse legs have suddenly started acting up? To find the answer to that question, we would have to examine Hanzaburō's diary. Unfortunately, however, the diary ends on the day before Hanzaburō suffered the final blow. We can, however, make an informed guess based upon events immediately preceding and following the day in question. Having examined the leading Chinese source books in the field (*Annals of Horse Governance*, *Horse Records*, *Yuan and Heng's Collection of Cures for Cows, Horses and Camels* and *Bo Le's Manual for Judging the Quality of Horses*), I believe I know exactly what caused his horse legs to become excited when they did. (ARZ12:94, translated by Rubin 2006, p.137)

After setting out in this manner his impeccable observational, analytical if not detective acumen, the narrator then supposes that Hanzaburō's legs, in an act

of unconscious memory, must have been responding to the call of the wild as the Mongolian air set in. Being the natural signal for all Mongolian horses to mate, the narrator admits that "the conclusion seems almost inescapable" that Hanzaburō's horse legs which had originally stemmed from a Mongolian breed must have felt the irresistible urge to migrate. Winking at Samuel Butler's ideas of latent physical memory, with which Akutagawa was well acquainted, the reader is also reminded of the tale of canine regression *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London (1876–1916) a writer whom Akutagawa also admired.

Butler, who sought to reconcile evidence for Christianity with Darwinist theories of evolution, set out a theory of memory as an atavistic explanation of the embodiment of habit, passed automatically from generation to generation. Butler saw memory as the spiritual animus which vivifies what he sees as Darwin's too mechanical evolutionary theory and unifies "the me of today and the me of yesterday"[112]. In *Unconscious Memory* (1920) of which Akutagawa had a copy, Butler explains in an empirical, rational style, rather like that of our narrator in 'Horse Legs', that it is habit based on memory which is at the bottom of all phenomena of heredity and that this unconsciousness may explain how habitual actions come to be performed. He sees that habits and functions are performed involuntarily and draws particular attention to involuntary movements of the limbs as proof of the reality of a divine superintendence made real in a purposive unconscious:

> We grow our limbs as we do, and possess the instincts we possess, because we remember having grown our limbs in this way, and having had these instincts in past generations when

[112] *Unconscious Memory* 1920, accessed at www.gutenberg.org.

> we were in the persons of our forefathers – each individual life adding a small (but so small in one lifetime to be hardly appreciable) amount of new experience to the general store of memory; that we have thus got into certain habits which we can now rarely break; and that we do much of what we do unconsciously on the same principle as that (whatever it is) on which we do all other habitual actions, with the greater ease and unconsciousness the more often we repeat them.

This atavism is a spiritual inflection of Darwin's species regression as understood in his 1871 *The Descent of Man*. Freud was similarly influenced by the notion of regression and common to all of these thinkers was the notion of the traces of animal life which linger in the human body and in the psyche. Christopher White marks the intellectual lineage when he shows that Darwin's notion of the continuity between human language and the inarticulate cries of lower animals was harnessed by Freud in his idea of the repressed (2008, p.86). Freud's scattered references to animality and to the deepest recesses of memory found literal expression in the links between animal magnetism and notions of telepathy. Hypnosis, the emphasis on dreams and occultism is partly a psychoanalytical application of Darwin's idea of species regression.

On this view, Hanzaburō's conflict between his will and the body which is no longer his own may be part of a deeper conflict between his conscious and his subconscious. In the climactic battle with and against himself which ends in his irrepressible flight, we witness the victory of the unconscious.[113] Freud's

[113] Akutagawa's interest in ideas of the unconscious and the repressed may be seen in such works as 'Daidōji Shinsuke no hansei' ('Daidōji Shinsuke the Early Years: a Mental Landscape', 1924). In this work there is what may be an ironic appropriation of Freudianism in the episode *Cow's Milk* in which Shinsuke

notion of repression centres on the rejected wish the ego finds incompatible with its need for societal approval being pushed back into the unconscious (Sokel 2002, p.158). In this divorce of bodily behaviour from conscious intention, the victory of the unconscious fulfils the rebellious wish of the repressed unconscious as in revealing the repressed desire to be free of the bonds of the family and work. According to Schopenhauer whom Akutagawa read avidly, what appears to befall us from the outside may be the fulfilment of our unconscious (Sokel 2002, p.160).

On a psychoanalytical reading then, the massive Freudian parapraxis which Hanzaburō enacts could be a physical interference of an unconscious and dynamically repressed wish guided by the super-ego and the rules of correct behaviour. Given the evident allusions to Freudianism and the unconscious in this work, the temptation to bring a psychoanalytical interpretation to the protagonist is strong but, as befits a study of Akutagawa, ultimately subjective and in no way conclusive. If we were so minded we might think that the trauma which brought about Hanzaburō's delusion may have been the rupture from his home country and his transplantation to China. We might support this view by recalling the exchange between Hanzaburō and his wife just before Hanzaburō flees and in which Tsuneko urges him: "Let's go home to Japan this summer, Hanzaburō. Please, we've been away so long." (ARZ12:96) Equally however, we might think that the pressure to conform to such rigid and

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curses his denial of his mother's milk and the jealousy he felt for the girl next door who sucked her aunt's breasts: "perhaps it was also the beginning of his *vita sexualis*" (ARZ12:41–2, translated by Rubin 2006, p.149). As ever it is the mythical narrative, this time that of Freud's œdipal complex, which is subtly questioned while also making reference to the sceptical work by Ōgai.

internalised norms of acceptable social behaviour as those espoused by the *Shuntian Times* were the cause of Hanzaburō's overstrain and eventual collapse: "the chains were ready to snap – not Tsuneko's chains but the human chains that bound Hanzaburō to the household" (p.139). It is just such various interpretations that reveal that what appears to be rational (psycho)analysis is in fact extremely open-ended and depends upon our intention.

Narratorial Dereliction

After setting out his theory of unconscious memory, the narrator in 'Horse Legs' appears to suddenly lose confidence and, as if suddenly realising that his explanation might appear farfetched, quickly adds some corroborating evidence which in fact corroborates nothing at all:

> Whether or not the reader finds my interpretation persuasive, we know from his colleagues that, at work that day, Hanzaburō was continually leaping about as if in a dance. (ARZ12:94, translated by Rubin 2006, p.138)

In this way, the ultimately contestable will to knowledge presented by such discourses as Butler's, and, we might extrapolate, Darwin's, Einstein's, Blanqui's or Freud's appear to be greatly weakened.

As for the mysterious hand of the divine *ex machina* of Butler's theory, in 'Horse Legs' its enigma is similarly unresolved and only diffidently alluded to. Butler saw that to regard every atom in the universe as living and able to feel and remember is to see the hand of God everywhere. Butler's work is illustrative

of the blurring of science and faith which was characteristic of contemporary ontological discourse. It has the full weight of scientific theory and yet, to modern eyes at least, appears to be questionable at best, implausible at worst. In 'Horse Legs', the enigmatic workings of the "strange office" which directs the time and place of human expiration suggest a higher power to whom reports have to be sent but whose identity is never revealed and the narrator glosses over the problem by recourse to such vague and inscrutable phrases like "the workings of destiny" and "a mystery of nature". In this way it is made clear that phenomena which are difficult to comprehend must needs be referred to an unspecified but ultimately indisputable higher agency, thereby making a mockery of the rational premise on which all observations are based and conceding that not everything is empirically comprehensible.

The crisis moment of Hanzaburō's now ineluctable flight is narrated in the journalistic third-person narrative voice which calls in the testimonial accounts of the crucial witnesses: his colleagues, bystanders, the Chinese house boy and Tsuneko to whom the narrator abdicates most of his authority from now on. She begins to fear that Hanzaburō may be going mad. When her account is later given to a woman reporter of the *Shuntian Times* as if to substantiate her version of events, the reader realises that the narrator is in fact rehashing the story as it appeared in the newspaper. Her account suddenly shifts to that of the servant who appears to corroborate Tsuneko's testimony but who may well be making things up as neither Tsuneko nor the narrator can back him up:

> Hanzaburō then – now, this is no longer Tsuneko's account. The last thing she saw was her husband flying up into the air,

> after which she fainted on the couch. Their Chinese houseboy, however, told the same reporter what happened next. Hanzaburō leaped to the entryway as if something were pursuing him. For a brief moment, he stood outside the door, but then, with a great shudder, he let out a long, eerie cry like the whinnying of a horse as he plunged into the Yellow Dust that enveloped the street. (ARZ12:96, translated by Rubin 2006, p.139)

After his flight, various reported and conflicting sightings of Hanzaburō are inconclusive: "This leads us to the inescapable conclusion that we have no idea where Hanzaburō went or what he did after he ran away from his company house on XX Lane" (ARZ12:97).

The pseudo-scientific approach which characterises the narrative style may call to mind that of popular mystery fiction writers like Edogawa Ranpo (1894–1965) but it is the conflation with investigative journalism which is inflammatory in this story for it reveals the latter to be nothing more than flawed detective work. Rather than resolve the story, the repeated recourse to scholarly and historical research, newspaper commentary, "expert" analysis, eye-witness accounts as well as Hanzaburō's pathetic diary entries reveals that each perspective has a different agenda: Hanzaburō's driving instinct is his rationally expressed fear of discovery and social exile; Doctor Yamai looks to preserve his own professional reputation; the narrator wants to resolve the mystery of his flight to prove his credentials as a serious reporter; Tsuneko wants to preserve her husband's reputation so as to not bring shame on the family; Editor-in-Chief Mudaguchi ("Idle Chatter") of the *Shuntian Times* is most concerned with the perilous impact of his desertion on wider society. The

omniscient narrator, whose role it is to adjudge one way or another reveals as the tale unfurls, that he is in fact merely a reporter, making sense of facts (real or illusory) just like the reader and that ultimately, his judgements are subjective and inconclusive. In a metafictional masterstroke, he even introduces the novelist Okada Saburō[114] at the end of the story who, having purportedly heard the story from someone else, apparently wrote to the narrator to tell him he could not believe that Hanzaburō had horse legs but that if he did, they would most likely have been forelegs from the description of his kicking and trotting. As if pre-empting the reader's misgivings at the very end of the story, the narrator swiftly adds:

> To be sure, I have my own doubts regarding these matters, but does it not seem a bit premature to discount not only Hanzaburō's diary but Tsuneko's testimony as well on that basis alone? (ARZ12:101, translated by Rubin 2006, p.143)

As if summing up the entire style of the story in a consummate non sequitur, he finishes by quoting an article which had appeared on the same page of the same issue of the *Shuntian Times* that had originally reported Hanzaburō's resurrection and which reported the sudden death of Henry Barrett. Rather than resolving any of the unanswered questions, the short article merely implicitly castigates Barrett, president of the US-China Temperance Society who was found to be clutching a bottle of liquor at the moment of his death. Furthermore, its inclusion as significant by the narrator may well be an ironic example on

[114] Okada had gone to France in 1921 and began publishing French *contes* that contrasted sharply with the autobiographical fiction that dominated much of Japanese publishing and whose work, Akutagawa found at least "promising" (Rubin 2006, p.251).

Akutagawa's part of the narrator's sense of the uncanny in which everyday coincidence is imbued with sinister significance and is a symptom of paranoid delusion, a device which would be developed more fully in 'Cogwheels'.

Modernity, Coercion and the Popular Press

So far we have focused on the way in which Akutagawa's narrative style may articulate a fundamental unease with perception as the basis for apprehending the world. We have seen that its contestable nature hovers between the rational and the delusional so that the reader is left wondering what is real and what is not. By choosing an archetypally dull anti-hero as protagonist and by juxtaposing him with decidedly fantastical elements, Akutagawa subverts not only the popular penchant for ordinary heroes but also the vogue for the I-novel which focused on the inner life of largely bourgeois men to create a unified vision of modern life. If 'Horse Legs' toys with the idea of narrating a delusion then it also undermines through its ultimate abdication of narrative authority, the reduction of fiction to the principle of confession and mimesis. The reader is left troublingly undecided as to whether Hanzaburō was in fact half-horse or whether he simply suffered such a delusion and indeed whether the narrator was himself prone to delusional paranoia.

In our focus on the subliminal vogue[115], we have looked briefly at Freud's critical thought on trauma and the repressed and seen how this might be useful

[115] Japan was the first Asian country to import Western-style psychology and establish a psychological laboratory in 1897, at a predecessor of the University of Tokyo founded by the first Asian psychology professor, Motora Yujiro (1858–

in approaching questions of displacement and normativity. We have also gone some way to outline how a developing social normativity was being internalised by increasingly nationalised Japanese subjects through education, popular culture and the popular press[116]. Let us turn our attentions more fully in this part to questions of the modern social experience and specifically to the Japanese sense of modernity as it was being formed under imperial capitalism. Our study of 'Horse Legs' may suggest that these diverse forms of compulsion could lead to a heightened sense of anxiety and isolation which some see as the defining characteristics of the modern condition[117].

Simmel argues in his seminal work of 1903, *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, that the individual both internalises and is psychologically transformed by the modern urban experience (Dodd 2014, p.39). While not specifically addressing the Japanese situation, Simmel's ideas are borne of the global experience of capitalist modernity and the advent of consumer culture and may also be helpful in understanding the rapidly modernising Japanese nation as it faced urgent questions about the relationship between the individual and wider society in the increasingly massified cultural system of the 1920s. As 'Horse Legs' is a tale of individual psychological trauma in the face of immense,

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1912), tenured between 1890 and 1912. He was succeeded by Matsumoto Matataro (1865–1943), tenured between 1913 and 1926. See Arakawa 2016, pp.56–69.

[116] For an in-depth study of the ways in which "popular culture" was embedded in daily practices and propagated through new mass media forms, see Silverberg, 2006. Silverberg argues that in the 1920s, the media reached all classes, connecting the rural social order to urban mores which they enacted in their practices towards food, housing, fashion, modes of popular entertainment, and attitudes toward sexuality.

[117] For example Harootunian sees that the advent of mass culture and consumerism at this time gave rise to the widely-held notion that spiritual values had been lost, especially after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 (2000, p.20).

overbearing social pressure and dislocation, it is worth pausing to consider Simmel's ideas in depth, especially as they were so influential in the early twentieth century. His is a characteristically pessimistic vision of modern man's lot under capitalism and delineates the futile resistance of the individual to being levelled and swallowed up in its oppressive cultural mechanism:

> The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life. The antagonism represents the most modern form of the conflict which primitive man must carry on with nature for his own bodily existence. (Simmel 1903, quoted in Levine 1971, p.324)

This excerpt might elegantly summarise the drama of 'Horse Legs' in its emphasis on the individual's struggle against an invasive culture which threatens to literally incorporate him. The offhand manner in which Hanzaburō's calamitous predicament is handled by the jobsworth bureaucrats, his powerless protest and yet his dogged determination to carry on his former life due to the tenacity of the social norms he has internalised suggest Hanzaburō's utter impotence when confronted with the faceless cultural and administrative apparatus governing his seemingly free-willed existence. We witness Hanzaburō's tragic struggle to maintain his humanity in the face of a doctrinaire administration which directs his physical and psychological being amid the suffocating twin moralities of material progress, forcing him to a life of modern drudgery and middle-class respectability and which leads him to loneliness and isolation.

To choose Hanzaburō as an archetypally ordinary character is to demonstrate the impersonal and ultimately inhuman nature of the global modern social apparatus. The unnamed Chinese officials think nothing of confusing him with the American Henry Barrett and even less of forcing him to adopt Mongolian horse legs. They even ask his identity in comical English, represented in the text in katakana: アアル･ユウ･ミスタア･ヘンリイ･バレット･アアント･ユウ？ (Are you Mister Henry Barrett aren't you?)

In the hands of this anonymous and autocratic administration, such powerlessly average individuals may be interchangeable and replaceable. Such a pessimistic outlook was voiced by many contemporary critics including the psychopathologist Karl Jaspers [118] who saw the modern condition as characterised by mindless conformity to an overarching regime which denied joy in work, alienated and conscripted the individual and engendered "a dread of life" (Jaspers 1933, p.63). In his *Man in the Modern Age* (1933) Jaspers was acutely aware of the destructive impact of what he called the "universal life-apparatus" which characterised modern living and which meant that the human became "a mere replaceable cog in a wheelwork" (1933, p.43).[119]

On this view, modern life sees the human individual converted into the repeatable, into a mere example. No one is other than the function he has come to assume: a useful and productive member of vocational and national groups

[118] Karl Jaspers wrote extensively on psychopathology but also on the threat to human freedom posed by modern economic and political institutions in *The Spiritual Condition of the Age* (1931) and *Man in the Modern Age* (1933).

[119] Such an understanding of modern society was extremely influential and Adorno and Horkheimer would later make the powerful point in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) that what characterises mass culture is the arbitrary selection of average individuals in whom the powerlessness of all is reflected. "They are mere matter. So much so that those in control can take someone up into their heavens and throw him out again – his rights and work count for nothing" (1947, pp.147–8).

(Adorno and Horkheimer 1947, p.84). Hanzaburō is respectable precisely because he is a productive, middle-class, married Japanese contributing to the prosperity of the nascent Japanese empire. When he is no longer able to carry out his personal and professional duties and when his ethnic purity is undermined by his foreign horse legs in the global marketplace that characterises international capitalism, Hanzaburō realises that the game is up. If modern society is only interested in people as customers, consumers and employees, the individual is tolerated only so long as his complete identification with the generality and status quo is unquestioned and he is urged to fit in or be left behind (Adorno and Horkheimer 1997 [1947], pp.147–53).

Hanzaburō's bourgeois existence is split into a public and a private life which is in turn split into keeping up a public image and whose intimacy, regulated through the institution of marriage, amounts to nothing more than the bitter comfort of being quite alone (ARZ12:92). Such a lonely existence is borne by the stoical protagonist who, in attempting to conceal his horse legs from his wife, convinces her of the salutary benefits of adopting a modern cultured life. Yet the private arrangements result in utter isolation and negation of sexual desire:

> February – I never take off my socks or underclothes, even in bed. Plus it's always a risky venture to keep my legs hidden from Tsuneko with a blanket. Before we got into bed last night, Tsuneko said, 'I never realised how sensitive you are to cold! Have you got a pelt wound all the way up to your hips?' (ARZ12:92, translated by Rubin 2006, p.136)

Jaspers would come to similar conclusions in 1933, calling attention to the brutalisation of the erotic, the way in which modern culture compromises physical and sexual instinct:

> …hygiene and comfort schematise bodily and erotic life. Daily affairs are carried on in conformity with fixed rules. The desire to act in accordance with general conventions, to avoid startling anyone by the unusual, results in the establishment of a typical behaviour which reconstructs upon a new plane something akin to the rule of taboos in primitive times. (1933, p.48)

In 'A Dwarf's Words', Akutagawa in turn deplored what he saw to be the twin moralities of capitalist consumerism and a kind of middle-class Confucianism governing modern life. He saw that the ascendant morality was that of the feudal age corrupted by capitalism and was entirely pernicious. Akutagawa goes on to note that the myth of marriage and domestic respectability which accompanied middle-class aspiration was a particularly stifling way of regulating sexual desire but not love. In the section entitled 'Chijō Rakuen' ('Earthly Paradise') Akutagawa derides the dream of family unity, filial piety and domestic bliss:

> The minute a woman becomes a wife she is changed into the spirit of an obedient domestic animal. The husband, untameable, is unable to ignore his natural instincts even though he tries absurdly to conform. (ARZ13:47)

Reading like a sketch for 'Horse Legs', these cautionary words express a sense of abhorrence at the modern institution of marriage in which women are brutally enslaved and men required to ignore their animal instincts and agree to conform to the emasculation of social expectation.

Marriage and domestic arrangements are but one of a range of performative everyday practices unpicked in 'Horse Legs'. The "modern, cultured" life that Hanzaburō and his wife Tsuneko lead in Beijing is indicative of the type of lifestyle ardently desired by the middle classes of the 1920s. They buy branded products, they listen to their gramophone, they go to the moving pictures, they choose to live a "modern, cultured" life by turning the Japanese tatami rooms into wood-floored western rooms, they own a sofa. Defined by material culture and convinced of their modernity (read progressiveness) we might see in Hanzaburō and Tsuneko's adoption of middle-class consumer culture an aspect of the ideological apparatus which expressed itself more insidiously in everyday practices. Garon notes the importance of the middle-class desire to attain certain lifestyles and their shared belief in modernisation in shaping and policing the public (1997, p.20). In this story we witness Garon's puzzling alliance between the state and the progressive middle-class groups in the modernising yet ultimately conservative agenda of improving daily life, saving, rationalising and maintaining social harmony. In this sense we see a close link between the state and cultural production: state ideology mediated through the press as the primary instrument of public opinion presumed, produced and policed a consumer subject (Silverberg 2006, p.22).

Kashiwagi has shown how daily life in the 1920s was transformed by "modern" consumer goods, part of the drive for Taylorist state-driven attempts

to reform lifestyles (2000, pp.62–63). Akutagawa's indictment of "the cultured life" in 'Horse Legs' is radical in its understanding of the mobilisation of the middle classes in the dissemination of a certain normative state ideology. In his disdain for the social-managerial force of public opinion and the glorification of consumerism, Akutagawa underlines the political implications of popular culture facilitated by conduits of mass media, as an industry whose purpose is to ensure continued obedience of the masses to market interests.

If the instrument which polices public morality is public opinion, then its henchman in 'Horse Legs' is the relentlessly sanctimonious Mudaguchi. The centrality of the press to public order is a theme to which Akutagawa returns often because he recognises that in order for psychological coercion to be successful, systems of mass media are necessary. The importance of the press and the literati in at once shaping and voicing public opinion had been acerbically derided in 'The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab' and here too, in 'Horse Legs', it is the newspaper editor who voices and limits public debate. This time it is the belief in the family as the unifying and coercive moral norm which embodies a national subjectivity in microcosm and macrocosm which is voiced by the farcically tabloid *Shuntian Times*:

> Like an unblemished golden jar, our glorious National Essence stands upon a foundation of belief in the family. We need not ask, then, how grave the responsibilities of the head of any one family might be. Does the head of a family have the right to go mad any time he feels like it? To this question we must offer a resounding "No!" (ARZ12:98, translated by Rubin 2006, pp.140–141)

Akutagawa saw that this vision of the popular press as courtroom or public confession box of modern society serves to castigate certain hitherto private behaviours. In the section of the posthumous manuscript of 'A Dwarf's Words' entitled 'Shūbun' ('Scandal'), he muses that: "the public likes scandal" and cites some well-known contemporary disgraces such as the Byakuran Incident which involved a poet giving birth to an illegitimate child after the Great Earthquake of 1923 from an adulterous relationship and being stripped of her name and fortune (ARZ13:53). He cites also The Arishima incident of 1923 in which the famous socialist writer had an affair with a married woman, Hatano Akiko, editor of *Fujin Koron* magazine. When Hatano's husband found out, the couple hanged themselves in Karuizawa. "The public," Akutagawa concludes, "find these scandals most satisfying" (ARZ13:53). In wondering why this should be so, he agrees with the French writer Gourmont that "one wants to see the scandal hidden in oneself". Yet more important is surely the fact that in the scandals of celebrities, ordinary people find justification for their own cowardice and they may use it as an excellent pedestal from which to discover their own moral superiority in order to convince themselves that: "I may not be as beautiful as Ms Byakuren but I am more virtuous than she." Or: "I may not be as talented as Mr Arishima but I know more of the world than he" (ARZ13:53).

Whether the popular press directed or merely voiced public opinion was part of an ongoing tension in the newly technicised and mediated world of the 1920s. Wider scientific, philosophical and social discourses were also becoming popularised and played a part in demarcating national subjectivities. The pseudo-scientific Modernology movement led by Kon Wajiro is a case in point.

"Modernology" was a research programme developed by Kon in the wake of the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 which was concerned with the transformation of life and the city. Kon describes how, like archaeology, "modernology" provides a method for the scientific analysis of material culture. An attempt to scientifically analyse modern culture and harness the cultural capital of academic discourse to define middle-class normativity, it was part of a wider movement to classify and regulate which, as we turn our attentions now to the promotion of ideas pertaining to normality and abnormality, would have far-reaching social implications.

Normality and Deviance

It is the social and moral censoriousness which accompanies the accusation of madness in 'Horse Legs' as something criminal, willed and avoidable which is the cathartic element and decides Hanzaburō's sad fate. Tsuneko, the company manager, Hanzaburō's colleagues, Dr Yamai and the editor-in-chief of The *Shuntian Times* make up the entirety of Hanzaburō's world and are representative of society as a whole. Jury-like, they are quick and united in their verdict and ascribe his disappearance to insanity. "No doubt this was simpler than blaming it on horse legs. For such is the Way of the World: to reject the difficult and go with the easy." (ARZ 12:97). Mudaguchi's editorial makes an explicit and comical link between rejection of the domestic norm (some might say penance) sanctified by marriage and the productivity of full-time employment and criminal insanity. It is not his insanity in itself which is troubling but his abandonment of his position as husband and head of the household and

the dangerous precedent that such a wilful estrangement could potentially herald which is alarming:

> What we would like to ask, however, is not "What is the name of Mr Oshino's malady?" but rather "What is Mr Oshino's responsibility to his wife?" […] Imagine what would happen if the husbands of the world suddenly acquired the right to go mad. All, without exception, would leave their families behind for a happy life of song on the road, or wandering over hill and dale, or being kept well fed and clothed in an insane asylum. (ARZ 12:97, translated by Rubin 2006, p.140)

To forswear the family, both in the domestic sense and in the metaphorical sense of the nation is, on this view, tantamount to insanity and insanity is a crime, to wit, treason: "Then our 2000-year-old belief in the family – our very pride in the eyes of the world – could not fail to collapse." Mudaguchi goes further to condemn what he sees as the malfeasance of successive administrations for having neglected this self-evidently urgent need for a law prohibiting insanity.

Frühstück in her compelling *Colonsing Sex: Sexology and Social Control in Modern Japan* (2003) argues that scientific and popular discourse in the 1910s and 1920s about sexual practice and domestic arrangements resulted in a set of socially accepted norms about sexual behaviour. Of particular interest is the notion that the individual body could be construed as a miniature of the national imperial body (Frühstück 2003, p.3). Mudaguchi's assertion that "our glorious National Essence stands upon a foundation of belief in the family" was one that actually recalls the hastily executed Meiji Constitution which cast the

Emperor as the supreme father and his subjects as supremely filial children. To shirk one's responsibility as head of the family goes against the apparently sacred tenets of the 2000-year-old institution and is hence a treasonable case of lèse-majesté. The sacrosanct notions of filial piety and normative sexuality as patriotic gestures are unsettlingly undermined in 'A Dwarf's Words' (posthumous manuscript) in 'Aru kōkōsha' ('A certain filially pious person') as we read: "He was filial to his mother. Of course, as he loved and kissed her, he consented to sexually comforting his widow mother" (ARZ16:79).

Frühstück argues that while the individual body was being envisioned as a metonym for the body politic, the male in particular was seen to embody the nation: vigorous, healthy, heterosexual and married (Frühstück 2003, p.3). Influenced by Herbert Spencer's theory of the nation as a social organism and Rudolf Virchow's notion of social medicine, Gotō Shinpei, who had been head of the Home Ministry's Medical Bureau in the 1880s, set out a vision for a modern health regime which centred on the national body as a human organism to be nourished, equipped and nursed. In his 1889 *Kokka eisei genri* (*Principles of National Hygiene*) he emphasised the connection between a state's military power and the health of its populace (Frühstück 2003, p.22).

Indeed, sexology, a German import, was established by the 1910s as a respectable field of knowledge and sexologists pushed for the education of the masses about correct and normal sexual behaviour (Frühstück 2003, p.9). Following the *Yomiuri Shimbun*'s publication of a series of articles in 1908 on the "sexual question" which intended to provoke a sense of urgency among parents, teachers, scientists and bureaucrats, the sexual issue as a social problem was anchored in the public consciousness (Frühstück 2003, p.8).

Opinions on masturbation, venereal disease, normalcy and perversion were rooted in the conviction that the creation and instruction of “correct” and “scientific” knowledge was necessary to improve the Japanese body.

Military research that found a link between venereal disease and neurasthenia soon found its way into thinking about civil society too and critics were quick to make connections between sexual practice, mental and physical ailments and challenges to the social order (Frühstück 2003, p.64). The fear of infection and social and moral degradation is clear in the call by the likes of the statesman and one time Prime Minister Ōkuma Shigenobu for a law that would regulate the lives of the mentally ill which is mirrored in Mudaguchi’s pronouncements in ‘Horse Legs’:

> Insanity occasionally becomes infectious. […] A society or even a state can eventually become morbid. I suppose that a nation like Russia might be infected by insanity. […] Once affected by insanity, even the Japanese, who have been known for a unique loyalty to their Emperor, may exhibit a disloyalty. […] Insane persons should be taken care of by the state. (Quoted in Nakatani 1995: p.15, in Frühstück 2003, p.65.)

If neurasthenia was increasingly construed as a pathological phenomenon caused by an excessive and misled sex life, then it is clear to see the connection between insanity and a lack of belief in the imperial system based on a “2000-year-old belief in the family”. The glut of journals on sexual deviance as a pathological condition such as the 1915 *Hentai Seiyokuron* (*Perverse Sexual Desire*) based on von Krafft-Ebbing’s 1886 *Psychopathia*

Sexualis can be seen as admonitory manuals to law-abiding citizens (Frühstück 2003, p.106).

From the mid-1920s the government used increasingly restrictive censorship regulations to shield the public from what was deemed prurient and morally questionable material and the journals most suppressed by the 1925 Peace Preservation Law were those pertaining to sexual desire, women's liberation and criticism of the institution of marriage (Frühstück 2003, pp14-5). Indeed, established for the preservation of public morals, the Law banded together those socialists deemed inimical to the State and those sexual deviants deemed incompatible with the founding ideology of the State, that of the family based around the institution of marriage (Frühstück 2003, p.154).

Hanzaburō's overwhelming anxiety stems from the fear that his miscegenation will be discovered. No longer dwelling in the Japanese heartland but in its colonial periphery, his racial difference as something to be preserved is a concern that was common as the empire expanded. In 1924 for instance, several Eugenics organisations were founded that generated a number of debates on heredity and racial hygiene (Frühstück 2003, p.162). Such organisations can be seen as potentially policing normal sexuality and rooting out unacceptable physiological or psychological impairment in order to keep the State healthy and vigorous. In his thirties and married for two years, undoubtedly the natural expectation for Hanzaburō and his wife would be to imminently produce children. Whether their offspring would have been normal or a grotesque mongrel is surely one of the principle reasons for Hanzaburō's pained flight. Tsuneko believes that his momentary insanity is caused by their sustained absence from Japan and we may infer from her imploration to return

to their homeland that physical and spiritual health is to be found in national communion.

Not accepted in society in any other than the narrowly defined roles allowed by the rule of modern morality regulated by popular opinion and other middle-class discourses of knowledge, Hanzaburō is destined to be a freak and an outcast[120].

Conclusions

Our treatment of 'Horse Legs' has centred on the curiously fruitful collision in the 1920s of capitalism, the subconscious, psychopathography and middle-class normativity to reveal an unsettling satire of modern life. As ever, Akutagawa is more concerned with perception rather than truth and with conviction rather than reality. The contemporary interest in the psyche, psychological deviance, delusion and paranoia prove a peculiarly rich terrain for the interrogation of cultural truths and accepted modes of behaviour. The spectre of the madman as outcast returns in *Kappa* in which the same narrative approach operates, that of a narrator retelling the tale of a possible lunatic extricated from society:

[120] Silverberg's authoritative study of *ero-guro-nansensu* reveals how popular discussions in the late 1920s of psychology, sexology and criminology coincided with the ascendancy of authoritarian political and social forces that strongly advocated fascistic ideological fantasies of cultural harmony and ethnic purity. Reichert focuses on the vague air of science which surrounded the 1920s concern among ideologues that deviance was sapping the Japanese nation of its vigour (2009, p.356). The pseudo-scientific freak discourse which characterised journals like *Hentai Shiryō* (*Deviant Materials* 1926) cannily exploited the mania that was one of the defining features of modern life.

> This is the story of Patient No. 23 in one of our mental homes. He will tell his story whenever he can persuade anyone to listen. (ARZ14:102)

In our next chapter we will focus on that fundamental act of faith, belief in the Christian myth which has galvanised societies for centuries but which, as Akutagawa saw, was also at the heart of many other mythical narratives, including that of the proletarian movement which was proving both ideologically and aesthetically troublesome in the 1920s as well as its surprising pendant, the founding myth of the Japanese Empire, itself at the heart of the imperialist imperative.

Chapter Five

Seihō no hito (*The Man from the West*, 1927): an Unorthodox Evangel

> As for the Church, I cannot conceive anything better for the culture of a country than the presence in it of a body of men whose duty it is to believe in the supernatural, to perform daily miracles, and to keep alive the mythopoeic faculty which is so essential for the imagination. (Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying*, 1889 [1986], pp.83–4)

> [The Japanese in the Russo-Japanese War] have a sovereign whom they adore as a deity and love with a passionate personal attachment. What can you do against such a people as that? – A people in whom patriotism is a religion. (Ambrose Bierce, *The Opinionator*, 1909–12 [1966], Vol. X pp.353–4)

We qualified in our chapter on 'Horse Legs' Akutagawa's concern with perception as opposed to truth as a kind of modernist epistemology. We also saw that his fascination with delusion and insanity tapped into a profound contemporary interest in psychological (ab)normality and deviance, the definition and application of which was beginning to play an expedient role in notions of social authority and control during the Meiji and Taishō periods. Garon has argued cogently that the state's obsession with orthodoxy at that time encompassed more than a narrowly defined respect for the sacrosanct Emperor and the imperial system because it was closely tied up with secular notions of social order, public morality and modernity. In response to the rise of socialist and communist movements deemed incompatible with the imperial way, the late Taishō period in particular may be characterised by the struggle to

regulate acceptable thought and articulate heterodoxy. Much discussed, the High Treason Trial of 1910, the establishment of the Special Higher Police in 1911, the Peace Preservation Law of 1925 and the Religions Bill of 1927 have all been held as examples of the drive to rid Japan of ideologies seen as pernicious to the national good[121].

Freud understood the part "culture" came to play in the modern shift from material to mental coercion in the regulation of society[122]. He asserted that its success depended increasingly on the internalisation of agreed cultural precepts (2008 [1927], p.12). On this view, culture is something imposed on a reluctant majority by a minority that has managed to gain possession of the instruments of power and compulsion and its *modus operandi* is infiltration of the psyche (p.4). Such an understanding was explored in our chapter on 'Horse Legs' in its illustration of the performative nature of cultural practice and the way its shared and powerful normative notions of deviance are readily and often subconsciously disseminated through mass-cultural channels. If, in our reading of Freud we are also reminded of Gramsci's notions of cultural hegemony, then it is clear that the advent of the modern imaginary of the masses brought with it wider ideological and cultural anxieties about the most effective means of social control.

Freud went further in his dissection of mass-cultural hygienics and indicated the fundamental role of religion in regulating social mores. Such a conclusion was certainly not new and the social function of religion had long been acknowledged by diverse writers and thinkers in Japan. For example the

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[121] See in particular Sheldon Garon's in-depth treatment *Molding Japanese Minds*, 1997, pp.61–3.

[122] Freud saw "culture" as the ideological sum of a civilisation's signifying practices rather than its purely artistic output.

nationalist thinker of the Tokugawan Mito school Aizawa Seishisai argued in his 1825 *Shinron* (*New Theses*) that the secret of western strength lay in Christianity, a state cult propagated to cultivate voluntary allegiance at home and in the colonies (Wakabayashi 1992, p.13). Aizawa developed this point to argue that Japan should cultivate a religion and a spiritual tradition of its own which would promote social conformity, to which end he articulated the concept of the *kokutai* famously taken up by the hugely influential Meiji writer and thinker Fukuzawa. Starrs notes the subsequent rearticulation of this belief when he describes the "fundamental transformation in the ideology of Shinto ultranationalism that took place in the Taishō period" (2012, p.23). According to Starrs, the increasing politicisation of the masses following the Russo-Japanese War of 1905 and the rice riots of 1918 convinced right-wing thinkers that a new popular form of emperor-centred nationalism was called for to inspire an intense religious fervour in the population at large (2012, p.23).

It is perhaps therefore unsurprising that our final chapter, a pendant to that on 'Horse Legs', takes as its focus the episodic reflection on Christ and belief in and about Christ, in which Akutagawa describes the paradox of Christianity as at once a conservative and a radical ideology.[123] 'The Man from the West' is an account of the way in which the man-made invention of the Christian patriarchal God keeps the individual in check by moving him to internalise its self-disciplinary logic just as it is a presentation of Christ as a communist *avant la lettre* whose passion and stubbornness precipitated his

[123] Emily Anderson (2010, xiii) has described how Japanese Christianity had come to be an ambivalent and at times suspect movement in the Meiji and Taishō periods: some Christians reconciled belief with newly constructed notions of Japanese identity and empire while others developed critiques of imperialism and militarism often on socialist terms.

execution by the state, willed by the mob. Both a romantic figure and the author of romance himself, Christ is presented as an abstraction, a charismatic and polyvalent metaphor who in many ways embodies the mythological way in which we apprehend the world.

In his representation of Christ as a journalist as well as a character within journalism, Akutagawa draws attention to the writerly nature of Christ as text as well as his polemical potential. He demonstrates how this author of short stories called “parables” also served as the protagonist of the New Testament, a novel-like biography, both of which have been expropriated for a variety of political positions. In his own short story which is an apparently personal response to the Christian narrative as well as its diverse ideological appropriations, Akutagawa shows how the story of Christ is the archetypal mythico-historical text which underlies many ostensibly contradictory modern systems of thought.

Unlike those critics who have sought in ‘The Man from the West’ signs of the author’s so-called spiritual malaise which foreshadowed his suicide, what will concern us in our reading is Akutagawa’s shrewd treatment of the Christian story as proselytising narrative *par excellence*. In many ways, we will argue, this work epitomises many of the author’s key ideas on belief and delusion, history and myth, authority and power which have absorbed us thus far and may point to new and fruitful ways of understanding the writer’s relationship with his age.

> Christianity's paradise is, after all, a tedious panorama. ('A Dwarf's Words', '*Chijō Rakuen'*, ('Earthly Paradise') ARZ13:46)

> It is unfortunate for the gods that, unlike us, they cannot commit suicide. […] He envied medieval man's ability to find strength in God. But for him, believing in God – in God's love – was an impossibility, though even Cocteau had done it!" ('The Life of a Stupid Man' 1927, ARZ16:201–5, translated by Rubin 2006, p.201)

As with all of Akutagawa's later works, the critical approach to 'The Man from the West' has generally been undertaken from the vantage point of the author's suicide in July 1927[124]. Having famously conceded in the letter now taken to act as a suicide note[125] that he was suffering from a "vague uneasiness" (*bonyari shita fuan*), critics such as Yoshida Seiichi (1970) have chosen to look for signs in these last works of the writer's deteriorating health and nervous breakdown (discussed in Doak 2011, p248). Not only was this all-pervasive sense of *fuan* used by contemporaries to position Akutagawa within what was perceived to be a broader cultural malaise but it was also seen by critics as proof of the writer's own sense of defeat at his supposedly ill-fated aesthetic bourgeois project[126].

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[124] 'Cogwheels' is undoubtedly the most prone to this approach and has universally been seen as evidence of Akutagawa's failing health and mental breakdown. See for instance Lippit, 2002.
[125] 'Aru Kyūyū e okuru Shuki' ('Note to a Certain Old Friend', 1927)
[126] This reading is treated in Seiji Lippit's 1999 essay *The Disintegrating Machinery of the Modern: Akutagawa's Late Writings*, p.27.

We saw in our chapter on 'Horse Legs' how *fuan* had become *the* vogue word of 1927 (Fujii, 2010, pp.3–7) and how what had started as an existential anxiety in Shestovan circles spread to the popular reading public to become fashionable, rather as being neurotic had become a desirable index of artistic sensitivity (pp.5–7). This late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century cultivation of madness in opposition to bourgeois norms is a symptom of the way in which insanity had become fashionable merchandise on the spiritual market (Karlsson 2012, p.185). Dorsey has shown how Akutagawa's suicide has been used discursively as a general historical allegory, the most famous proponent of which remains Miyamoto Kenji whose *Literature of Defeat* berated Akutagawa's "blatant bourgeois narrowness" (quoted in Dorsey 2009, p.107). This sense of artistic resignation was later reimagined as the encapsulation of a "pure" aesthetic national sensibility and one cannot help but wonder whether such a monumentalisation of Akutagawa's suicide and his subsequent reinvention as the incarnation of Japanese sensitivity might have appealed to the author's macabre sense of irony.

As recently as 2009, Tansman in his important study *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism* seems to follow the criticism of the proletarian writers of the 1920s and, with a 1930s aesthetic in mind, sees Akutagawa's "retreat" into aestheticism as a proto-fascistic gesture, an apparent acknowledgement of the futility of politics (2009, pp.39-40). Indeed he goes so far as to see within him the progenitor of fascist modernism, believing that his was an "apolitical, poetic work that held the promise of revitalising Japanese society from its spiritually exhausted state" (2009, p.39). Tansman maintains that it was Akutagawa's sense of cultural crisis that catalysed his attempt to recover – or construct anew

– an increasingly idealised past and while he does not refer specifically to 'The Man from the West', we might infer that the "religiously inflected sense of epiphany" that characterised the so-called aesthetic movement with which Akutagawa has subsequently been associated can be found in this final work.

Many have chosen to see in 'The Man from the West' a sometimes confused and desperate spiritual quest and a final exhausted yielding to the solace of Christianity. It is remarkable that most scholarship has focused exclusively on the topoi of anomie and existential reflection as a means of explaining the author's suicide. The overarching focus on the author's self-proclaimed sense of *fuan* and his eventual suicide has led critics to probe Akutagawa's relationship with Christianity and his supposed spiritual soul-searching as we shall outline presently.

As Kevin Doak remarked in his far-reaching survey of critical scholarship on the work in 2011, 'The Man from the West' has received only marginal treatment from Anglophone scholars who see in this work a purely aesthetic fascination with Christianity, preferring to concentrate on other perhaps more obviously modernist texts which may be construed as symptomatic of a sense of disintegrating subjectivity.[127] In contrast, Japanese scholarship on the work and on the broader relationship between Akutagawa and Christianity has been prolific. Deferring to Ishiwari Tōru, Doak defines a major trend within Japanese scholarship: that which presents the text as a self-portrait of Akutagawa. Yoshida Seiichi, Sako Junichirō, Sasabuchi Tomoichi, Miyoshi Yukio and others

[127] Doak draws attention to Seiji Lippit's reference to 'The Man from the West' in a footnote to support his characterisation of Akutagawa's interest in Christianity as "purely 'aesthetic'" and the fact that he mainly focuses on its cultural reception in Japan (Lippit 1999, p.xx, n.8) and also to Karatani Kōjin who describes Akutagawa's interest in Christianity as merely cultural or "aesthetic". See Doak 2011, pp.247–8.

are some of the leading exponents of this biographical approach. Yoshida tracks Akutagawa's interest in Christianity from his first English copy of the New Testament in 1902 to his final borrowed copy of the Japanese translation which he used to research 'The Man from the West' and which was discovered next to his body after his suicide (discussed in Doak 2011, p.250). Sa-Ok Cho also sees the work as an Evangel written by the biographer Akutagawa. She concludes that the author relates his life to that of Christ through his struggle with society and death, although she claims that he does not fully understand that paradoxical "something beautiful" of religious transcendence until the end (1995, pp.209 and 220–1).

Doak notes that this autobiographical interpretation may be part of an attempt to discover the literary self-affirmation of a solitary, tormented writer whose fascination with Christ merely reflects the writer's own increasingly dark, suicidal impulses. Even in his 2011 survey and translation Doak declared that his aim was to show how Akutagawa's interest in Christianity was not merely cultural or "aesthetic", but deep and serious in order to shed further light on his tragic suicide (p.248).

It is evident then that critics have generally seen this work either as proof of Akutagawa's love for Christianity or as part of a personal, philosophical quest and as yet no consensus has been reached as to the writer's spiritual leanings. Indeed, Kawakami Mitsunori (2005) acknowledges that Akutagawa's *kirishitan* texts constantly alternate between a pro- and anti-Christian stance to conclude that his position towards Christianity was in fact fundamentally ambivalent (discussed in Suter 2013, p.150).

If we were to insist on looking for an illustration of Akutagawa's position in relation to Christianity, we would do well to return to his writing. Tsuruta remarks that in a notebook on miscellaneous subjects, the author jotted down in English: "The attraction of Christianity for a Japanese: 1. aesthetical side 2. ridiculous side 3. symbolism" (1967, p.166). These three aspects seem to summarise succinctly the author's treatment of Christianity in 'The Man from the West' as it is the powerful romance, drama and tragedy of the narrative, as well as its absurdity which are central to Akutagawa's treatment. Furthermore, in 'A Dwarf's Words', Akutagawa appears to embrace a decidedly sceptical approach to faith and, in the section entitled 'Jiyū ishi to shukumei' ('Free Will and Predestination'**),** notes: "Pragmatism - we should take the same attitude as to all the other balances: God / Devil, […] Reason/ Faith" (ARZ13:47).

Many critics have based their view of Akutagawa's supposed philosophy of inward-looking aestheticism on the letter he wrote in his early twenties to Tsunetō Kyō in 1914 in which he compares religion to art and indeed raises the status of art to a kind of *Kunstreligion*[128]:

> One does not need to find God in religion. Only when we try to squeeze our faith into the narrow frameworks of theology do arguments of pros and cons arise. I have faith in "this thing" and that is my faith in "art". I refuse to think that this ecstasy of art is inferior to that of other faiths." (quoted in Tsureta, 1967, p.165)

[128] Literally "art-religion", the Nietzschean concept of Art as the highest expression of the human spirit.

Art may well have been Akutagawa's spiritual comfort but in finding the symmetry between faith and art, he suggests that they work in analogous, powerfully emotive, even ecstatic ways. Faith acts for some as the cognitive filter through which the world can be understood, and for others that filter is art. Faith is, in a sense, artistic and the point is that neither faith nor art is a direct apprehension of the world but a necessarily mediated one, like the mode we described in 'The Ball'. The narrator acknowledges as much in 'The Life of a Stupid Man' when, in the famous passage that begins the book, 'Jidai' ('The Era'), the books of western writers Maupassant, Baudelaire, Strindberg, Ibsen, Shaw and Tolstoy are not in fact indices of the modern age but they have become, for the narrator at least, the modern age itself at the expense of other more shabby realities. In that work as in 'Cogwheels' the narrator may not interact with reality outside this aesthetic filter. If we replace the word "filter" with "delusion" we see how the logic returns full circle. 'Cogwheels' takes this filter/delusion effect to its logical conclusion in its narration of paranoia inflected with the literary uncanny:

> A foreigner came swaggering in my direction, a man around forty who appeared to be near-sighted. This was the neighbourhood Swede who suffered from persecution delusion and whose name was actually Strindberg. I had a physical reaction to him as he passed by. (ARZ15:79–80, translated in Rubin 2006, p.232)

While these later works are the narrative exploration of delusion and paranoia, it is important to note that 'The Man from the West' proceeds in a different way. In 'Cogwheels', the reader is given the painful impression that the protagonist and

narrator “boku” is writing autobiographically about his nightmarish experiences.[129] Unfortunately, an in-depth study of that fascinating work will have to be deferred as it lies beyond the scope of our study here but we would merely suggest that such a meticulously well-crafted work indicates an acute lucidity of mind. Written in the same year as ‘Cogwheels’ and ‘The Life of a Stupid Man’, ‘The Man from the West’ is ostensibly not about madness nor does its narrator appear to be deluded although the spectre of insanity is alluded to in its association with genius and conversion which we shall explore later in the chapter. Rather than being an exposition of neurosis it exemplifies in a more self-conscious way the *mechanics* of a powerfully proselytising aesthetic which, it will be argued, equates faith, however manifested, with delusion.

In summary, the biographical and psychoanalytical approaches which have characterised scholarly enquiry into ‘The Man from the West’ to date are of little interest to us here other than for their metahistorical potential. That we should see faith in the text as inherently problematic is always a given when reading Akutagawa and so we shall also approach any simple autobiographical reading of this work with caution. The romantic reinvention of the idea of Akutagawa might be of interest because it encapsulates many of the key concepts we have pursued throughout this study but we shall not approach ‘The Man from the West’ from this already much rehearsed angle. Rather than viewing this text as evidence of the author’s spiritual communion or otherwise with Christ, we shall try to demonstrate that it is best seen as part of an intellectual continuum interested in faith more as an intellectual paradox than as

[129] As Karlsson indicates, the story is carefully assembled to conform to known biographical facts about the author, even quoting an aphorism from ‘A Dwarf’s Words’ (2009, p.621).

a spiritual dilemma and as a mind-set with potentially powerful political uses. By exploring narrative technique and aesthetic manipulation of emotion in this work, we hope to probe further these mechanics in order to discover new and interesting angles on the expropriation of Christ as a supremely powerful poetic figure in the employ of this most malleable and influential of myths.

History, Faith and Narrative Form

> **FAITH**, *n.* Belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel.
> **SCRIPTURES**, *n.* The sacred books of our holy religion, as distinguished from the false and profane writings on which all other faiths are based.
> **PROVIDENTIAL**, *adj.* Unexpectedly and conspicuously beneficial to the person so describing it. (Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*, 20015 [1911])

Akutagawa finished writing the first part of 'The Man from the West' on 10th July 1927 and completed 'Zoku Seihō no hito' ('The Man from the West: The Sequel') late at night on 23rd July just hours before he took his own life. Both texts were subsequently published in the journal *Kaizō*. Together, they form a series of disparate reflections on Christ as a powerful literary figure as well as Christianity as a religion, historiography and energising political myth. In their unorthodox readings of Biblical episodes, Akutagawa literally demonstrates the fact that meaning is not something inherent in the text but is constructed

imaginatively by the reader for his own ends and in accordance with his own cultural experience[130].

As ever, form is crucial in articulating meaning. 'The Man from the West' is not a devotional work but rather employs a classic Akutagawan structure in which the appendix qualifies and subtly undermines the main body of the text. Both parts, like the aphoristic 'A Dwarf's Words' and 'The Life of a Stupid Man' are episodic and subtitles are given for each section. The style is at once intensely confessional, revelatory and occasionally sentimental as well as classically Realist. The narrator begins by confessing that he was artistically in love with Christianity ten years ago and that he intends to record his Christ as he believes him to be (ARZ15:246). He concludes his story of Christ by revealing that "his life will always move us […] We are, just like the travellers on the road to Emmaus, unable to live without seeking Christ who sets our hearts on fire" (ARX15:289, translated by Doak and Matthews 2011, p.279). Elsewhere he is sentimental: he describes the love between Christ and Mary Magdalene as "an iris in bloom" and the kingdom of heaven as rose-petal and soap-scented (ARZ15:254, 257; 2011 p.263). While the narration is intensely personal, it also claims authority by its simple enunciation of "facts" which the reader already recognises. For instance, we read that "The Christ child went to Egypt, then 'withdrew to the district of Galilee … to a town called Nazareth,' where he remained" (ARZ15:250; 2011, p.259) However, faith in the text is questioned at every turn through the subtle use of irony and intertextuality. Ultimately, in the interrogation of the New Testament as historical text, the reader is left with the impression that while the Christian story's emotional appeal is undoubtedly

[130] Indeed, the subsequent disparate critical readings of this text also encapsulate this key idea.

strong, its claim to historical truth is absurd. As we shall explore presently, Akutagawa interacts in this text with several nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians who expropriated the Christian story and presented it as History in order to strengthen their own often radically diverse ideological ambitions. The reader is minded to view this text ironically as well as approach those texts cited as the remnant of the late nineteenth-century's ideological academisation of History as exegetic tool.

Returning to our initial question, why Akutagawa seemed suddenly gripped by Christianity at the end of his life, we might wonder whether he chose to expose the harnessing of History to strengthen various ideological readings of Christian mythology because to write about the mobilisation of Japanese historians to legitimate the Japanese imperial myth would be utterly inflammatory.[131] Let us not forget that the Peace Preservation Law of 1925 made it a crime to question the national essence as the basis for the sacerdotal state and that historians at Tokyo Imperial University, if they were to keep their job, were obliged to accept the distinction between education (*kyōiku*) by which students were to be taught useful and inspiring fictions appropriate to their status as imperial subjects, and scholarship (*gakumon*) as academic research (Brownlee 1997, p.128). As such, our initial premise in our chapter on 'The Peach Boy', that Akutagawa was acutely aware of the mythologisation of Japanese history for ideological ends, is strengthened here. Indeed Hiraizumi Kiyoshi (1895–1984), a passionate nationalist who was appointed Assistant Professor at Tokyo Imperial University in 1926, wrote in his article 'Fact and

[131] See in particular John S. Brownlee's fascinating *Japanese Historians and National Myths*, 1997.

Truth in History' of May 1925 that faith is at the heart of knowledge and that history is the means by which subjects can be moved to positions of faith:

> The scholarly style since Meiji has been mainly to work at searching out the facts. This is called scientific research. The research method is analytical. Analysis is autopsy. Autopsies are for the dead. The opposite, searching for the truth, is unifying. Unifying is life. But it is not science; rather, it is art, and taken to its end, it is faith. […] What makes history live, and continue, is the mysterious spiritual power of living people who believe in it. By this spiritual power, fact becomes truth. Thus the historian will become the priest for the past, present and future and will assist in the development of Heaven and Earth." (Shigaku Zadhi 36.5 1925, p.371, quoted in Brownlee 1997, pp.170–1.)

Akutagawa's ironic undermining of the Christian story as historical project can be seen in his use of subtitles which range from those universally recognised as Biblical like 'Mary', 'Joseph' and 'The Wise Men' to those which are wryly contemporary like 'The Bohemian Spirit' or 'An Unconventional Moralist'. The assumed canonical authority of the text is shot through as the narrator seems to suggest that Christ's story was just another social controversy. At first sight, its organisational logic confirms Christian orthodoxy which, when coupled with a seemingly divinely revealed omniscient narrative style, stakes an obvious claim to narrative authority. As we read on, we note how the reiteration of canonical works actually undermines them as it casts the story into doubt.

Papini, Barbusse and Renan: Other Stories of Christ

One such instance of playful parody may be seen if we compare Akutagawa's version of 'The Wise Men' with that of the influential Italian writer and journalist Giovanni Papini. Later a fascist, Papini celebrated his rediscovery of Catholicism in 1921 by penning his passionate and proselytising *Storia di Cristo* (*History*/*Story of Christ*) in 1923.[132] In the preface he admits that he was not looking to write a "scientific history" of Christ but, rather like Matthew Arnold had done before him, a history whose credibility would be inflamed by passion to move the reader to a position of faith[133]. Like the Bible itself, Papini's unequivocal and authoritative tone establishes the credence of the revelation by uniting science and faith:

> They were guided to Judea by a new star like the comet which appears every so often in the sky to announce the birth of a prophet or the death of a Caesar. […] They alone knew the future, and Destiny. […] Theirs were the secrets of heaven and earth. In the name of science and religion they held first rank in the nation. (1923, pp.24–5)

This is a witness account which is clearly not meant to be questioned even though the association of magic and science sits somewhat awkwardly. Akutagawa's version pays lip service to the conventional narrative details of the

[132] Akutagawa owned a 1924 English translation of Papini's work and we may see 'The Man from the West' as the invalidation of the ostensibly historical premises on which proselytising writers like Papini based their work.
[133] Akutagawa owned a 1911 copy of Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism*. Arnold wrote in his *Literature and Dogma: Towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible* that what was needed to convert the lapsed masses to faith was a "morality touched by emotion" (1924, p.18).

famous Biblical episode but employs Papini's revealed narrative style to utterly undermine the Wise Men's exclusive claim to sacred wisdom, placing them rather in a broader weariness of trite and hackneyed stories:

> The Wise Men from the East saw the appearance of Christ's star and came bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Yet, they were but two or three of the world's wise men. The other wise men failed to notice the appearance of Christ's star. One of the wise men who did notice refused to yield his position on the observation tower (being older than the others), looked up at the brilliantly shining star and, taking pity on the Christ child far off in the distance, muttered to himself, "Again?" (ARZ15:249; 2011 p.259)

While not disputing the providential appearance of Christ's star, the narrator shifts his focus to the (mis-)apprehension and (mis-)understanding of the divine sign by fallible human observers and the words of the world-weary Wise Man who could not be bothered to move, thereby revealing that the coming of this particular Christ was no longer a miraculous event. This experience of a kind of Baudelairean *ennui* shifts the narrative into a metanarrative of romanticism in which spleen, a particularly modern malady is the manifestation of doubt and dull angst experienced at the destruction of old illusions and the loss of awe[134].

Akutagawa purportedly wrote 'The Man from the West' in response to that handbook of socio-anarchism, Barbusse's *Jésus* which appeared in 1927 (Doak 2011, p.252). Written by a French communist activist, *Jésus* is a first-

[134] For the French poet, man is confined by the *ennui* of spiritual void to an earthly cycle of desire and consummation in which the sublime is only imaginary or attained fleetingly through physical pleasure. See Farrant, 2007, p.63. In an apparently similar pique of spleen, Akutagawa famously wrote in 'The Life of a Stupid Man' that "*Life is not worth a single line of Baudelaire*" (ARZ 16:38).

person account of the narrator's imagined Christ and while he declares his aim of going right back to the "real past" in a positivist and objective way (p.245) what he produces is ostensibly a guide to political agitation. Both Barbusse and Papini use History to give intellectual legitimacy to their political agenda and both employ a Realist style to disguise that ideological motivation. Akutagawa's narrator in 'The Man from the West' remarks in the section entitled "The Resurrection" (*Fukkatsu*), that since his death, Christ has undergone many changes depending on the political agenda of his writers:

> Still, it is certain that since his death, Christ has undergone many changes. […] But what has not changed is the way that, since his resurrection, curs have turned him into an idol and others have committed acts of tyranny in his name. This is why the christs born after him have become his enemies. (ARZ15:271, 2011 p.270)

Pointing in this way to the many ideological reiterations of Christ, he begins that same section with a direct reference to the hugely influential French historian Renan[135], noting Renan's emphasis on the power of imagination in envisioning Christ. Renan's *La vie de Jésus* (*The Life of Jesus*, 1863) treats Christ as a historical figure but in casting him as a modern-day socialist clearly positions him within a broader polemical agenda. As a philologist, Renan complained that other studies were not historical enough and he made the controversial assertion that not only should the life of Jesus be written like the life of any historical person but that the Bible should be subjected to the same critical

[135] Akutagawa owned an 1899 English translation of Renan's *Antichrist* (Scott Library).

scrutiny as other historical documents (p.viii).[136] Renan's seemingly ingenuous historicism disguises a harnessing of history to an ideological cause. In affecting to write Christ historically, he creates him imaginatively and indeed sentimentally, literally illustrating the absurdity of objective claims to historical authority and showing that he is more interested in showing the process by which histories become monumentalised as History rather than any inherent historical truth.

Renan's averred historico-philological approach to the Christian story is of paramount concern to us because it is a methodology which paradoxically claims authority in its recourse to respected, even sacred texts as it turns the revelation into a supremely contingent event. Akutagawa's reference to Anatole France in the section "Pilate" (*Pirato*) is particularly remarkable because it reminds us of the sceptical disposition which was wary of the political ends to which grand narratives are harnessed. Remarking that France was the only person not to have been deceived by the legendary aura given to Pilate, the narrator recalls in the reader's mind France's *Procurator of Judea* (1902) in which years after the crucifixion, Pilate bathetically dispels his fame as he mutters: "Jesus? […] Jesus of Nazareth? I cannot call him to mind." (1902, p.16) France's rewriting of the justification for Christ's crucifixion is hardly providential and is depicted rather as the world-weary capitulation of the procurator who caved in to the blood-thirsty demands of the crowds.[137]

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[136] This is an idea which Anatole France surely satirised in *L'île des pingouins* (*Penguin Island*, 1908). Renan was vaunted by Anatole France as the incarnation of modernity. *L'île des pingouins* throws up questions of the problems of grand metanarratives, mythologisation and romantic nationalism.

[137] Like Akutagawa, France takes delight in rewriting accepted history and satirising the way in which facts can be falsified and public opinion mobilised for

Ironically, in historicising the life of Christ, Renan, Papini, Barbusse *et al* had gone some way to desacralise the Christian story and expose it to the same historical critique as other texts. In their presentation of history as an objective, positivist undertaking it is clear that these writers were all overwhelmingly concerned with the question of authority. Yet in their practice, historical authority is only ever important because it gives credence to the historical narrative which is being created: in Papini's case a conservative proto-fascist apology and in Renan and Barbusse's a radical socialist position.

Desacralising the Historical Will to Knowledge

The demythologisation of history as an ideologically loaded endeavour is the starting point for Akutagawa's version. Not only was the author conscious of the fallacy of objectivity in historical writing but he was also acutely aware of the ideological nature of the historiographic enterprise hidden behind the historian's claim to objectivity. The generation of faith in the text – and here the notion of faith is pushed to its intellectual limits – can be a powerful ideological tool, even more so when the text covertly stakes a claim to historical or social reality. In the opening section "Ecce Homo (Behold the Man)" (ARZ15:247), the narrator sets out his at once macabre and romantic interest in the Christian story: macabre in his pathological interest in martyrs and romantic in the novelistic presentation of Christ in the Gospels, getting carried away for instance in his imagining the bright red persimmon trees which frame his personal depiction of

political ends. The allegory in *L'île des pingouins* of the Dreyfus Affair is a further powerful case in point.

Christ. The narrator is quick to point out that his Christ is a very personally imagined Christ and that such a romantic engagement is in fact fundamental to any real appreciation of the Christ story.

More than a recognition of the emotive force of the Christian story, 'The Man from the West' is a palimpsest of historiography and addresses the New Testament itself as well as subsequent reiterations. Akutagawa is conscious that the Bible is ideological history *par excellence*, overwhelmingly concerned with establishing orthodoxy and heterodoxy just like any modern political manifesto. Presenting progress as unfolding organically as part of the providential plan, the Biblical worldview is deeply historical. As a philological and literary enterprise it is supremely teleological, reinterpreting pre-existing work in the Old Testament and finding within it signals and messages for the future. Its narrative approach combined with the eye-witness accounts of the apostles of the New Testament is the exemplification of the Realist method, exhibiting an ideological consciousness within early Christianity and an urgent need to prove itself against the previous world. Forensic, evidential and polemical, the Bible also uses a range of literary devices to better move the reader to a disposition to believe: metaphor, vernacular stories, supernatural prescience, constant use of the future tense, capital letters etc.[138]

The narrator of 'The Man from the West' undoes the providential pretension of the story of Christ from the outset. Not only does he qualify his

[138] Matthew Arnold in his *Literature and Dogma: An Essay towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible* took the pragmatic view that there is nothing reprehensible in the Bible's exploitation of all those literary devices at its disposal to better move the reader to a disposition to believe (1924, p.97). If the Bible works by imagining itself as having been written according to God's own plan then it stands to reason that to employ the same tropes as the Bible would make for similarly convincing reading.

presentation of the saviour of the world as that of “my Christ” but he also refers to the likely existence of “other Christs than the Christ” thereby underlining the way in which the Christian teleology is merely a matter of historical presentation, a supreme example of the historian’s act of selective memory. He often remarks on the reassessment of certain historical “facts” in their subsequent rewriting. For example the depiction of Judas as the wickedest disciple is seen to be merely politically and narratively expedient and is historically scantily substantiated. The narrator also notes that it was only many years after the death of Christ that his story came to touch people’s hearts throughout the world, thanks to its imaginative retelling:

> The one who had the most influence in this respect was Paul, the journalist who felt Christ’s heavenly gifts with his entire being. (ARZ15:271; 2011 p.270)

In his repeated description of the Bible as a monumental act of journalism, Akutagawa draws attention to the importance of the act of writing and mass dissemination in its widespread appeal.

Mixing the objective, erudite and at times aphoristic realist style of the apostle-witnesses with the personal and persuasive tone of the journalist, the text is peppered with occasionally absurd details with the result that the reader is often unsettled and his accepted viewpoints are decentred. The narrator typically proceeds by stating a fact followed by an explanation but such a classically exegetic style is gradually revealed to be unsubstantiated or absurd. Initially such facts are easily recognisable and universally accepted given their Biblical provenance such as that regarding Mary: “Mary was just an ordinary

woman" (ARZ15:247). However the story is immediately lifted from a shared realist presentation and projected to that of a magical realist tale: "But suddenly one night she was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave birth to Christ." Of course we know that this is the Gospel's explanation of the Immaculate Conception but we suddenly feel the accepted truth to be incongruous and strange.

In the entry on the Holy Spirit (*Seirei*), the sense of disquiet proceeds from a statement of fact, more personally conceived: "We may sense a bit of the Holy Spirit in the wind or in a fluttering flag" (ARZ15:248; 2011 p.258) and the narrator expands his explanation to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit may also be found in the brains of the mentally ill. Following the exposition of Christ's miraculous conception, the narrative tone appears to be calmly rational but often the narrator adds a modern-day explanation which, although it may seem on first reading completely logical, the reader knows to be unorthodox. The narrator transfers for example the Immaculate Conception to a modern chattering tabloid-inflected culture: "Clearly, Mary's conceiving by the power of the Holy Spirit was scandalous, as it caused quite a stir among the shepherds" (ARZ15:249). We can imagine the salacious gossip surrounding the pregnancy in the popular press rather like one of the celebrity scandals Akutagawa reported in the section 'Shūbun' ('Scandal') in 'A Dwarf's Words' (ARZ13:53).[139]

Not only does the incursion of the everyday into the legendary underscore the latter's lack of verisimilitude but it also calls into question the status of religious mystery. If magical realism relies upon the presentation of imagined or magical elements as if they were real and part of the everyday world then it relies upon realism only so that it may stretch what is acceptable

[139] This is discussed in our chapter on 'Horse Legs'.

as real to its limits. On this view the Gospel, a realist text with supernatural elements moves the reader to a position of faith through the authoritative tone of the apostles. Akutagawa's version, by confusing impeccably orthodox yet decidedly supernatural Biblical references with mundane modern-day cultural experiences is disquieting because it defamiliarises the Biblical story as it presents what has been understood as a modern, seemingly rational outlook to be invaded by things too strange to believe. This spectacle of the ordinary as perceived through a mysterious lens can make the mundane appear phantasmagorical and leads us to question the status of the Bible story as accepted reality.

If the Bible is the archetypal Realist novel parading as revelation, its status problematised by the paradox that its revealed truth is set down by the fallible human witnesses the apostles, then the narrator mirrors that process in *Seihō no hito*. In the section 'Ten ni chikai yama no ue no mondou' ('Dialogue on a Mountain near Heaven') in which Christ converses with "christs who had been born earlier" and in which he has a premonition of his own death, the narrator draws attention to the gaps in the Biblical account and takes the imaginative liberty of filling them in:

> Yet down below in the distant valley, the pomegranates and figs must have been in fragrant bloom. Perhaps smoke too was faintly rising up from the chimneys of the houses below […] Christ wanted his discussion with his 'great deceased' predecessors to be a private entry in his personal diary. (ARZ15:262; 2011 p.265)

Remaining within a narrative sphere which the reader recognises from his knowledge of the Bible, the narrator interprets what he reads in radically unorthodox ways so that the reader, in questioning his interpretation, also comes to doubt that of the apostles. The narrator's constant reference to the apostles as journalists or biographers and his comparison in the sequel of the merits of the apostles' different styles – John's is flattering and his style is the most "up to date" (ARZ15:275 given in English in the text)[140], Mark's is vivid and realistic – underlines their human and inherently imperfect status as it stresses the role of Realism in conscripting the reader to a position of faith.[141]

Our initial focus on narrative style and historical will to knowledge in 'The Man from the West' has shown that it is a hugely intertextual and self-reflexive work in which attention remains at once on the diverse poetic reimagining of a powerful, shared, romantic narrative and also on the mechanics of that narrative both textual and extra-textual. By including references to an eclectic range of critical writers and thinkers like France, Darwin and Nietzsche, the narrator enlists his work in a wider cosmopolitan debate on the relationship between myth, history and broader spiritual identities – whether national or religious. It is an oppositional work: the main characters do not behave as they are supposed to; the apostles are relegated to the position of fallible biographers; Christ is conceived as a brilliantly persuasive journalist who dies for his beliefs and the narrator as a modern-day hack writing to a brief and to a deadline. The

[140] We might understand by this phrase "up to date" that it is the most Realist style because the narrator qualifies his remark by saying that "The Christ John depicts does not appear to leap beyond what is human".

[141] Akutagawa's subversion of the Realist mode to comedic effect can be seen elsewhere in his many works which treat Christianity but which lie outside the scope of our current study, in particular *'Tobacco and the Devil'* (1916), *Juria no kichisuke* (*The Life of a Holy Fool*, 1919), 'The Wandering Jew' (1917), 'Ogin' (1922) and 'Rushiheru' ('Lucifer', 1918).

accounts of Renan, Papini and Barbusse, who all professed to be scholarly and objective while actually subjective and ideological are parodied throughout. The narrator's recollection in the section entitled "Christianity" (*Kuristo kyō*) of Wilde's discovery of Christ "as the greatest of romantics" (ARZ15:257) sets the work within a broader discourse on the emotive appeal and political potential of certain archetypal narratives as we shall explore presently.

Romance as Conversion

> But wherever there is a romantic movement in art there somehow, and under some form, is Christ, or the soul of Christ. (Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*, 1897 (1986), p.172)

The subversion we detected in "Ecce Homo" (Behold the Man) is a very Akutagawan device which disturbs clichéd plot lines and has characters rebel against the narrative expectations of the reader. "Ecce Homo" is of course the title of many iconic visual representations of Christ on the cross as well as of that mordant work by Nietzsche written in 1888 in which the bold sub-headings suggest that the narrator mockingly compares himself to Christ. In Akutagawa's "Ecce Homo", far from offering a personal paean to the Christian faith, the narrator sets out a subtle critique of the intellectual and emotional allure of Christianity as well as a deconstruction of "historical" surveys of Christ's life. It serves to illustrate that the narrator's interaction with the Christian story was romantic rather than religious and that all religious conversions are necessarily romantic.

"Ecce Homo" contains four key ideas which animate the work and which we will use to guide our reading. Firstly, subverting our expectations of a deeply-felt religious devotion, the narrator begins by remarking on his consciousness of the profoundly poetic and emotive appeal of the *idea* of Christianity:

> About ten years ago, I was artistically in love with Christianity, especially Catholicism. Even today I have a vivid memory of Japan's Temple of the Blessed Mother in Nagasaki. In a sense I am no more than a crow picking away at the scattered crumbs left behind by Kitahara Hakushū and Kinoshita Mokutarō. (ARZ15:246; 2011 p.257)

This is a devotion experienced artistically: mediated through aesthetic artefacts and through contemporary symbolist poetry rather than via a leap of faith. The narrator is not in love with Christianity but rather with its image as created by the late Meiji poetry of Kitahara and Kinoshita. Their work came to be known as *nanban bungaku* (barbarian literature) because of its depiction of the lush climate of Kyushu where they sought inspiration and escape from Tokyo as well as of its exotic Latin cultural and religious remains (Xiong, 2014, pp 77-8). In this way the narrator winks at the appeal of all exoticising literature just as we explored in 'The Ball'.

Secondly, the narrator expresses a keen psychological interest in the psychology of devout Christians:

> Then several years ago I developed a certain fascination with Christians who had been martyred because of their Christianity. I took a pathological interest in the mentality of the martyr,

> which seemed to me just like the mentality of all fanatics. (ARZ15:246; 2011 p.257)

This use of the word "pathological" (*byōteki na*) is striking because it draws attention to the shadowy area between faith and delusion and inscribes religious fanaticism within the medical binary of normality and insanity which, as we shall see, will be crucial to our understanding of the text. Indeed the third entry 'The Holy Spirit' (*Seirei*), invokes the famous Italian psychiatrist and criminologist Cesare Lombroso who claimed that there exists a link between genius and pathological insanity: "Lombroso for better or worse, discovered the Holy Spirit in the brains of the mentally ill" (ARZ15:248; 2011 p.258). As we shall explore later, Lombroso categorised genius in terms of social acceptability and social anathema depending on political situation and application. He argued that there was a kind of healthy divine genius of whom Christ was the archetype as well as an unhealthy genius like that of the megalomaniac Napoleon. Yet by inscribing Christ in a line-up of other comparable geniuses, both Lombroso and the narrator of Akutagawa's text merely relativise them in order to diminish their aura while at the same time hinting at their possible underlying insanity.

Thirdly Akutagawa's narrator professes his affection for the character of Christ as he has been sketched in the Bible: "But then finally, in more recent days, I began to love the Christ as handed down to us in the four Gospels" (ARZ15:246; 2011 p.257). This final quotation is remarkable not because it reveals an immediate love for Christ but because it demonstrates an appreciation for the *character* of Christ as mediated in narrative form. By drawing attention to the precedence of the written form and the way in which our understanding takes place entirely through its filter it shows how the

Gospels are responsible for creating a powerful religious and emotional response through the exposition of the protagonist Christ. Here there is a very discernible nod to Wilde whose ideas about the importance of the imagination in co-creating art is evident and which we explored at length in our chapter on 'The Ball'. The written word may form the necessary starting point but the imagination does the rest and the reader is partly responsible for the artistic collaboration. This may be seen in the narrator's admission of a personal Jesus:

> My Christ, having been born in Japan, does not necessarily gaze upon the Sea of Galilee. He can also see the port of Nagasaki underneath the bright red persimmon trees. (ARZ15:246; 2011 p.257)

Fourthly, the narrator goes on to warn readers that his writing of Christ will be inherently subjective and has no claim to historical objectivity:

> I am not so concerned with historical and geographical facts. (But my purpose is not to avoid the challenges of journalism. For those young and serious who wish to take on the task of depicting the historical Jesus, there are five or six biographies of Christ that should suffice.) I cannot dally over precise descriptions of each and every word and act of Christ. I am merely trying to record my Christ as I believe him to be. I hope the strict Japanese Christians will forgive the Christ described by this hack writer. (ARZ15:247; 2011 p.258)

If Christ's story is to be positively constituted as romance rather than factual account then it is a subversion of the fundamental belief that the Gospels are gospel. Thus the narrator utterly negates from the outset any claim to objective

truth and yields unreservedly and indulgently to his poetic imagination. We may infer that any other writer who has attempted a Life of Christ must have inevitably proceeded in the same manner. In fact when commenting in *The Sequel* on the general consternation and narrative lacunae in the wake of the mystery of Christ's death and miraculous resurrection, the narrator gently mocks Papini:

> Even Papini, who provides endless commentary on Christ's every word and action, merely quotes Matthew on this incident. Here, one discovers the poetic passion of Papini, which got the better of him. (ARZ15:287; 2011 p.278)

Indeed we recall a similar admission in Papini's *Storia di Christo*: while the search for empirical, historically verifiable evidence is futile, the objective truth of the narrative is fundamentally sound and irrefutable:

> To attempt in these texts to differentiate what is sure from what is probable, what is historic from what is legendary, what is original from what has been added, the primitive from the dogmatic is a hopeless undertaking which almost always ends in defeat. […] In these matters, the subject, which is truth, is interchangeable and there can be nothing new except in the manner of presenting it in a form more efficacious because it may be grasped more easily. (1923, pp.11–12)

Papini's apology is a paradox: it reveals the Bible to be a text which is intrinsically subjective but holds a claim to some higher, mysterious objective

truth. In its appeal to providential direction, it disguises its ideological motivation by naturalising it as revealed and indisputable. Akutagawa's narrator seems to do the same when, having confessed the self-indulgence of his artistic presentation he protests that he is not avoiding the challenges of journalism although here the journalistic rigours of reportage can hardly be equated with being the medium for divine revelation. This use of the term journalist ジャアナリスト (in katakana) rather than that of historian or evangelist is striking: not only does it transpose the Biblical story to modern times but it also implies that in their similarity to journalism, the Gospels reflect superficial thought and propagandising research, a popular slant and hurried composition rather like the work "of this hack writer". Furthermore in his self-identification as a hack writer the narrator positions himself as a modern-day scribbler who exploits for money his creative ability in the production of banal, unimaginative and trite work at the behest of his bosses and for a particular audience. His comparison of the journalistic output of the apostles in 'His Biographers' ('*Kare no denkisakusha*') in the sequel seems to suggest that they too were working under pressure from their publishers as we shall explore in the next section.

The Gospels as Hack Journalism

> Christ asked his followers: "Who do you say that I am?" It is not difficult to answer this question. He was a journalist as well as a character within journalism – he was the author of short stories called "parables" while also serving as the protagonist of the novel-like biography that is called the "New Testament". We are likely to discover that this kind of thing is true about many christs. ('The Man from the West', ARZ15:282–3; 2011 p.276)

We have outlined at length how the status of the Gospels, the apostles, the protagonist, the narrator and the text itself is constantly contested in 'The Man from the West'. It presents the Bible as a realist novel in the biographical mode, the protagonist as a skilled short-story writer and brilliant journalist as well as a character who has been endlessly reimagined. It sets out the apostles as biographers of varying skill and the narrator as a harried hack journalist. It explains that the reason behind the positive reception of Christ's journalism was a timely gap in the market combined with a mass audience receptive to the product. It comments on how the presentation and panache of Christ's journalism were integral to its success, suggesting that the circumstances of the author/protagonist's death guaranteed its future sales while also pointing to ways in which the message of the work has been reinterpreted by future generations[142].

The sequel to 'The Man from the West' is a freer and sharper critical reflection by the narrator on the manufacture and application of the Gospels as

[142] Parallels with Akutagawa's posthumous reinvention are striking here.

well as an admission that his own text was written by a hack journalist to a punishing deadline. Doak and others see the narrator's declaration that he was having to write in a hurry as a literal explanation for the "careless mistakes" in the main body of the text such as the reference to Elizabeth as Mary's friend rather than cousin (2011, p.258). He notes Yoshida's suggestion that Akutagawa was working under very difficult physical conditions and may have been losing his mind (p.259). Yet it might also be possible to see the narrator's textual mistakes not as signs of Akutagawa's mental turmoil but rather as clever contrivances included to give credence to the conceit that the narrator was a harassed journalist working under pressure. What is most striking in the sequel is that the occasional sentimentality of the main text is missing and instead we are presented with the cool eye of the sceptic. This narrator, or should we say journalist, reflects meta-textually on the ambiguous status of the writer as both artist and cultural commodity and thereby locates his own text, as well as Christ's, within a larger economic framework and encourages us to question not only the narrator's role as an artist but that of the protagonist and the apostles as well. In this way, the romantic presentation of Christ as tragic hero becomes just another mawkish page-turner demanded by the publishing industry.

In its basic premise and exposition, this work as a whole and the sequel in particular radically undermines the status and authority of the Bible as a divine text existing outside the workings of the broader cultural economy. In reducing what has been unquestioned as revelation to the status of news writing, the narrator throws the Gospels open to questions of bias and historicity. The narrator identifies himself as a "hack writer" in the opening paragraph and in the sequel he offers a meta-narrative reflection, expressing dissatisfaction at

his rushed work which he puts down to the pressure of working to gruelling deadlines:

> I was outlining my Christ, but I had to come to a hasty conclusion because my publisher's deadline was pressing. Now that I have a bit of free time, I would like to add a little more to this depiction. (ARZ15:274; 2011 p.272)

What is remarkable here is exactly the contrast between the self-representation of the narrator in the first part as a writer with an artistic temperament sensitive to the poetry of Christianity and in the second as a harried hack, churning out words in accordance with public demand. Might it be that this frame story not only pokes fun at the cultural industry of the 1920s of which Akutagawa was himself a part, but also at that false distinction between *junbungaku* (pure literature) and both proletarian and mass literature that was gaining credence in the 1920s? Might we detect a certain irony here in the narrator's (self-) identification of Christ as the bohemian artist working outside convention which is the image the industry demands?

Akutagawa had often reflected on the wider pressures of the publishing world, noting for instance in 'Subjective Portraits' that in order to meet deadlines, "I always have to write hurriedly and under pressure" (ARZ11:187). In 'Green Onions', that ironic mock-up of a carelessly executed modern tale for a sentimental audience, the narrator prefaces his story with his confession that he plans to write the story in a single sitting in time for his deadline the next day: "No, I don't 'plan' to write it: I absolutely *have to* write it" (ARZ5:234, translated

by Rubin 2006 p.120). Indifferent to the details and to his protagonist, he constantly returns to his deadline as a way of apologising for churning out such a slipshod story. Wondering at one point what his protagonist did until 6 'o' clock the following day the narrator interjects:

> Unfortunately, not even I know the answer to that. How can the author of the story not know, you ask? Well (tell them the truth now!), I don't know because I have to finish this thing tonight. (ARZ5:242; 2006 p.126)

In the end, the narrator completes the frame by exclaiming:

> I did it! I finished the story! The sun should be coming up any minute now. I hear the chill-sounding crow of the rooster outside, but why do I feel depressed even though I've managed to finish writing this? (ARZ5:246; 2006 p.129)

Exhilaration at meeting his deadline against the odds is undoubtedly marred by the writer's depression at having prostituted his art.

By turning Christ into a dispensable journalist, the apostles into biographers and the narrator into a hack writer, Akutagawa radically implicates the text in the modern publishing system. This act of desecration means that we neither view Christ's message as divinely revealed nor the Bible as providential but as journalistic and therefore mundane and potentially lacking in altruism. The romanticism by which the narrator appears so ardently moved is made to seem mawkish and sentimental as when he writes with irony: "At some point, the rose-petal, soap-scented kingdom of heaven of Christianity disappeared

entirely into the sky" (ARZ15:257; 2011 p.263). Or again when he describes the love between Jesus and Mary Magdalene:

> Their platonic love is still fresh and fragrant, like an iris in bloom. From time to time, Christ probably found some consolation for his lonely heart in occasional glances in her direction. (ARZ15:254-255; 2011 p.262)

Even the narrator admits in the sequel that the biography penned by the apostle John "strikes those of us born in modern times as a bit too sweet" (ARZ15:247; 2011 p.272).

The narrator further draws attention to the modern culture industry by repeatedly calling attention to multiple Christs, thereby not only diminishing Christ's holy aura but also implicating him in a modern network of technological reproducibility and a loss of authenticity. In this he is undoubtedly indebted to Remy de Gourmont to whom he refers in the section 'Jehovah' ('*Ehoba*'). This influential French writer, critic and philosopher depicted multiple divinely-inspired Christ figures – Spinoza, Saint Paul and Epicurus to name but a few – in *A Night in the Luxembourg*[143]. We have already noted the Wise Men's weariness as yet another prophet is announced. Akutagawa returns often to this idea of *Doppelgänger*, either as a symptom of delusion in 'Cogwheels' or drawing on Blanqui's rejection of progress and his theory of the eternal return in 'A Dwarf's Words' or indeed, as we have seen, in 'The Peach Boy'. It is with a

[143] This is the third-hand story of a meeting and philosophical discussion with a figure resembling Christ in the Saint Sulpice Church near the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris. Akutagawa owned a copy of the 1912 edition of de Gourmont's *A Night in the Luxembourg* with a preface and appendix by Arthur Ransome.

certain pathos that in the section 'The Life of Christ' the narrator claims that there are christs to be found in abundance in factories: literally manufacturing the Christian product in bulk.

Akutagawa had previously made several references to the precarious status of the artist in modern society, placing art squarely within the capitalist cultural economy of modern life. He even alludes to his own position as when he complained of being made to stand in front of an audience in place of a bill board (Mack 2010, p.113). In 'Subjective Portraits', he had explained how modern mass audiences demand heroes to worship. In that social commentary he refers to those "manufacturers of modern legends whom we more commonly call artists" (ARZ11:199). In the short piece 'Mensura Zoili' (1917), scientists develop a weighing machine, a valuometer which can accurately measure the value of literary works. In 'A Dwarf's Words' the narrator avers in 'Aru shihonka no ronri' ('A Certain Capitalist's Logic') that:

> Selling an artist's work is not really any different from selling the packaging on my tin of crabmeat. Yet if we call him an artist everyone in the world thinks it's like a treasure. (ARZ13:69)

Bohemianism as a Product of Modernity

Chytry has explored the emergence in the 1920s of what may be described as the romantic cult of the artist and the burgeoning religion of art and argues that this was the natural intellectual outcome of the advent of mass culture (Chytry 1989, p.224). This modern cult of art and the artist, while it appeared and may have been packaged as pure aestheticism, was in fact situated very squarely within the mass cultural economy. Moreover, if the phenomenon of *bunkashugi* (culturalism) was first used in 1919 and a translation of *Kultur* gained currency in 1920s, this was largely in response to fears of contamination by mass culture and proletarian literature. This movement, with which Akutagawa was later associated, envisaged art as divorced from pragmatic concerns, transcending politics, based on the idea of a universal culture (Hayter 2009, p.20). Engendered and enabled by the mass cultural economy, the mid-1920s saw a splintering of the cultural imaginary into camps which were mutually reinforcing: those part of the *shinkankakuha* (New Sensationism) and *junbungaku* (Pure Literature) movements positioned themselves in opposition to both popular literature and proletarian literature which gained definition in the juxtaposition. Akutagawa had famously been type-cast by the mid-1920s as an aesthetic writer with no regard for political engagement. In his 'On Proletarian Literature' he acknowledges that proletarian literature is actually borne of bourgeois culture. What Akutagawa took offence at was not the politics of left-wing thinkers as such but rather their vision of art as propaganda and advertising and which drew him to conclude that there is not much difference between capitalists and proletarians.

‘The Man from the West’ illustrates how the bohemian is a product of mass culture and in this observation we might sense an awareness of what was actually at stake in the contemporary movement towards culturalism. In his representation of Christ as a bohemian, the narrator expresses anxiety about the tension between the independence of the artist and his subjection to material realities as the entry in the sequel entitled ‘Christ’s Purse’ demonstrates:

> Christ’s income was most likely derived from his journalism. Nonetheless, bohemian that he was, he always said, “Do not worry about tomorrow.” A bohemian? Here as well, we have no difficulty in seeing the communist within Christ. In any case, his genius took flight and he had no concern for the things of tomorrow. Perhaps the journalist who wrote “The Book of Job” was more sublime. But Christ had an ability to quietly insert a tenderness into his works that is lacking in “The Book of Job.” This ability must have been no small help to his income. Before he was crucified, his journalism commanded the highest market price. But compared to after his death— yet just look at how nowadays the American Bible Society sanctimoniously takes its profit every year. . . . (ARZ15:278; 2011 pp.273–274)

The bohemian is always a paradox because bohemians – maverick artistic spirits – are always a product of an enabling economic system. As the commercial counterfoil to mass cultural production, the figure of the bohemian is imagined to stand outside the mercenary commercial reality of the art world and is therefore a peculiarly modern phenomenon. The notion of the bohemian as it emerged in the nineteenth century reflects the uneasy position of the arts in

modern society (Siegel 1999, p.5). A safety valve for tensions of capitalist society, bohemians may also be understood as part of a bourgeois subculture whose flamboyant eccentricity deflects energies from truly radical preoccupations. In the tension between Christ the bohemian and Christ the Communist, the narrator points to the commonality of their ideological positions. We might also see how the Marxist myth of the proletariat and future redemption may have sprung from the same myth.

As an artist, Akutagawa found himself in a bind: he was held up as a bourgeois aesthete by proletarian writers at a time when the expansion of mass culture had engendered the market need for the concept of "pure literature". It is this historical intersection which branded Akutagawa as an apolitical aesthete with no concern for wider social concerns and which has coloured the critical approach since his demise. Yet, as we have demonstrated throughout this study, Akutagawa, far from being an isolated intellectual or an egotistical aesthete was in fact keenly aware of the mechanics of culture and its ideological and political implications. The fact that he did not embrace proletarian literature does not make him an ultranationalist and in fact he was suspicious of any political application of literature. 'The Man from the West' reveals a writer who is sharply critical of the cultural framework of his day and it is ironic that he was in fact castigated then celebrated as a figure who apparently stood outwith the political and economic apparatus of his time.

Seihō no hitō exemplifies how Jesus as an artist and as a journalist was complicit in the process which turned him into a mass cultural product. Forced to perform miracles he was also frustrated at his disciples' lack of understanding: "'Why do you not understand?' He repeats this sigh often"

(ARZ15:284). It also demonstrates that the product gained in popularity after Jesus's death and in fact precisely because of his tragic death which, we may infer, might have been a masterful marketing ploy.

The Journalist as Social Critic

Having explored the relationship of journalism to modern cultural industries, it is also possible to see how the role of the journalist was being defined in other more positive ways in the Taishō period. Doak in his 2011 treatment of 'The Man from the West' draws attention to the critical role journalists had come to play at this time. He argues that journalists maintained a professional attitude that had been honed in the Meiji period prior to and during the Freedom and People's Rights Movement. They had come to see themselves as "dissident intellectuals who sought to effect change through questioning and criticising the policies of those in power: they challenged the sword with the pen." (p.261) Doak argues that the status of modern Japan's first journalists, shared in common with Christians, of being outside the circles of power of the new regime, shaped Akutagawa's understanding of the term *jānarisuto*. This sense of criticism of the status quo, of a love of freedom is subtly equated with communism in the text. Christ is portrayed as a "heretic" communist who felt passionately his vocation. As a radical left-wing thinker, he was prepared to sacrifice everything for his "journalism" and his crucifixion at the hands of the state shows that being a critic is a perilous position to adopt. While the narrator does not refer to the Kōtoku High Treason Trial of 1911 he does declare that "to discuss the communist within Christ carries with it some inconvenience in

Japan". He draws attention to the way in which Christ's outspokenness and the strident evangelism of his message, "tantamount to a communist manifesto", brought him to blows with the authorities tactfully referred to as "fate":

> If he had loved something else instead, he probably would have grown into an old prophet in the shade of some giant fig tree. Had he done so, peace no doubt would have descended on him. He would have smiled derisively, having made all sorts of *compromises* just like other wise men of old. But for better or worse, fate did not afford him a peaceful old age. (ARZ15:277; 2011 p.273)

The reality of insidious intervention by the state into civilian life be it through censorship or propaganda is a constant theme in Akutagawa's later work. In *Kappa* (1927), the entire frame story is set against the sinister backdrop of a mental asylum. A caustic satire of modern Japanese life, the text is held in credible tension rather as it is in 'Horse Legs' and we are left to wonder whether the patient is actually deluded or whether he has been compelled to present his biting commentary as an allegory because he may not speak plainly. It is striking that this fierce critic is interned as a lunatic: the reality of censorship in Japan is alluded to in the text before the speaker, Mag, is ironically silenced by being hit over the head with an empty bottle. It is a story in which we bear witness to the fact that heterodox voices are either silenced or immunised.

Examples of Akutagawa's engagement with radical political thinkers are plentiful and references to Nietzsche, Marx, Tolstoy, Bakunin and Kropotkin are easy to discern. Bakunin, in *God and the State* (1882 [1970]), is excoriating in

his critique of the complicity, as he sees it, between the State apparatus and the Christian Church and homes in on the latter's role in inuring believers to their subordinate position through its exercise of emotional coercion of the very young and impressionable. Writing of the mysteries of the passion, the resurrection of Christ and the promised redemption of mankind, Bakunin declares:

> Such are the absurd tales that are told and the monstrous doctrines that are taught, in the full light of the nineteenth century, in all the public schools of Europe, at the express command of its government. They call this civilising the people! Is it not plain that all these governments are systematic poisoners, interested stupefiers of the masses? (1970, p.11)

Bakunin goes on to berate the fact that people are kept in ignorance by the organised efforts of all the governments who consider this ignorance as one of the essential conditions of their own power (p.16). Akutagawa's reference in 'Subjective Portraits' to those "prisoners who do not know they are prisoners, husbands and wives in the prison clothes of the new age, walking in an unending stream, up and down the Ginza." [ARZ11:203] reveals an acknowledgement of contemporary mental servitude to modern capitalist hegemony akin to Bakunin's repudiation of authority and control sixty years earlier.

A no less barbed critique of the ideological application of Christian morality was that of the French symbolist poet and anti-Christian critic Remy de Gourmont, whom the narrator paraphrases in *Seihō no hito*, noting that when

Christ preached the God in heaven, he in fact *created* the God in heaven. It is with scathing irony that de Gourmont in *A Night in the Luxembourg*[144] draws attention to the fabrication of religious legend and superstition which demand obeisance from society. Christ's biggest mistake, according to de Gourmont, was taking twelve disciples who proceeded to contort his elementary ideas and disseminate twelve different kinds of folly. All religions, in de Gourmont's eyes, are reinterpretations of the same idea and with the same purpose: to induce people to adopt particular behaviours and renounce others. The prescriptions of modern Christian morality, the corruption of the "pious dreams of some Jews", have turned men into the most obedient of domesticated animals. Social obedience, according to de Gourmont, is the object of the "proselytism of all the great creators of social lies".

It is precisely this political function of religion that de Gourmont sees to be the most harmful perversion of Christ's original ideas and why he calls "priests of religion" "priests of politics". He goes on to announce that since God is a dream, charming or cruel, useful or dangerous according to the hands in which it finds itself, the idea of the deity can be transferred from pious to revolutionary dreams alike which explains why the sacralisation of labour and its reward in some future age has been used to justify the "tedious myth of socialism".

The epistemological and historiographical issues raised by the reinterpretation of thought is a theme subtly addressed in 'The Man from the West' and it is shown to be a necessarily political reinscription. The disparate and indeed oppositional ideological positions the "journalists" are made to

[144] Accessed at http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/46766, 14th April 2015.

assume illuminate the political polyvalence of the Christian myth. For instance, the journalist Jesus Christ is ironically portrayed as a Nietzschean aristocrat whose life "trampled on the social conventions of the day" and who was "like all christs, a superfool constantly dreaming of the future". (ARZ15:280; 2011 p.275)[145] Yet the spectre of Marx, another visionary who dreamt of future deliverance, is similarly evoked: being tempted by the devil, Christ rejected the kingdoms of this world and their glory and was ever "ready with his dialectic method" (ARZ15:253; 2011 p.260). If we swap the messianic martyr-saviour with the glorious proletariat then we understand how the Christian romance can be harnessed for revolutionary ideals just as easily as conservative ones (Sokel 2002, p.224).[146]

Narrative Appropriation, Sentimentalism and Delusion

> The more unjust and inhuman an interest is, the greater need it has of sanction. Now where find it if not in religion, that good protectress of all the well-fed and the useful consoler of the hungry? And more than ever the bourgeoisie saw that religion was indispensable to the people. (Bakunin, *God and the State*, 1882 [1970], p.83)

[145] Such a comparison is poignant since although Nietzsche averred that God was dead, he went on to create a superman who dreamt of future redemption remarkably like Christ.

[146] It is worth noting that Hayden White's ground-breaking *Metahistory* (1973) emplotted romance as the genre which best used metaphor to anarchic ideological ends and enlisted Michelet and Nietzsche's works as potent examples.

> Have you read the Acts of the Apostles? It is not as good as "Aladdin and the Marvellous Lamp", but how moving it is! (Remy de Gourmont, *A Night in the Luxembourg*, 1912)

We will recall from our exploration of 'Horse Legs' that in 'A Dwarf's Words', Akutagawa argues that mysticism is central to the success of civilisation. Recalling de Gourmont's symbolism, he held that superstitious thinking is at the heart of modernity and modernity is all about faith:

> We don't listen to reason. No, we listen to something that transcends reason. I said "something" – a more suitable noun I cannot find. If I was forced to give it a name like a rose or a fish or a candle, well they are all just symbols. (ARZ13:35)

Indeed we saw in our study of 'The Ball' how Wilde's notion of the mythopoeic is central to our apprehension of the world. Wilde has it in *De Profundis* that Christ's place is with the poets since in the account of his life through the four prose poems of the gospels, we come to understand his life as the articulation of pathos and tragedy (1986, p.165). Of course when Wilde attempts the same narrative myth-making in order to convert his own history into personal fable, he turns himself into a tragic, Christ-like protagonist with an irony that can surely not have been lost on Akutagawa.

Recalling Wilde, the narrator in 'The Man from the West' calls Christianity "a poetic religion" and in the section on Jehovah he notes that "sentimentalism is easily confused with the divine" (ARZ15:259; 2011 p.264). The narrator refers explicitly to De Gourmont who notes that "God for men is a matter not of reasoning but of sentiment" and he goes on to argue that the Christian narrative preys peculiarly well on man's sensibility. De Gourmont calls the gospels "naïve

arabesques with faith": pastorals, legends and fairy tales "reserved for the exercise of the populace, children and timorous women".

If we understood in 'Horse Legs' that what characterises the modern age is the drive to conscript the subject to acceptable national behaviours then Akutagawa demonstrates in 'The Man from the West' that religion is by far the most explicit and effective means of ideological conversion since it works through faith powered by emotion rather than rational thought.[147] Such a view is redolent of Nietzsche's assertion in *Beyond Good and Evil* that the psychological "unfreedom" brought into being by religious ideology had been achieved metaphorically, that is to say by the introduction into the world of symbols which force us to behave "as we have always behaved, namely *mythologically* (2003, p.51)"[148].

Profoundly aware of the power of metaphor in shaping human behaviour, Nietzsche held that the articulation of religious neurosis was a potent political weapon. Stating in *Beyond Good and Evil* that religion is not only a means of overcoming resistance and uniting ruler and ruled, it also ennobles obedience for the ordinary man (2003, pp.86–7).[149] Nietzsche's concern is to uncouple what he saw as a natural religious feeling from religion and to redirect it to a more salutary purpose as for example when he describes the metaphysical hopes and deep peace encountered in the transcendent mood created by music.

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[147] This is an exemplification of Matthew Arnold's belief that the true meaning of religion is morality touched by emotion (1873 [1924]), p.18. Akutagawa owned a 1911 edition of Arnold's *Essays in Criticism*.

[148] Akutagawa owned copies of Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, *The Genealogy of Morals* and *Thus Spoke Zarathrusta* and refers to Nietzsche throughout his work.

We saw in our initial survey of scholarship on 'The Man from the West' how Akutagawa had voiced such an opinion when he described his faith in the ecstasy of art rather than in the confines of theological doctrine.

Akutagawa's admission in 'The Man from the West' of the fabrication of God does not bring with it the existential freedom that de Gourmont had urged. Rather, it is a kind of short-lived Nietzschean liberation. Nietzsche saw that large masses of people across the world are from time to time seized by psychiatric depression, whose diagnosis and remedy are generally sought in the psychological-moral domain: "this is my most general formula for what is usually called a religion" (Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals* III, p.17, quoted in Murphy 2001, p.83). Nietzsche's idea of a religious hygienics presupposes a psychological sickness for which a physician is required. As he writes in *Human, all too Human*, the natural state of melancholia was co-opted by the Christian church into the theory of evil. Man, by a series of errors of reason, was drawn to look to a newly formulated concept of God to purge him of his ills: "Thus he develops a deep discontent and searches for a doctor who might be able to put an end to this discontent and all its causes." (2004, p.91)

In Nietzsche's view, the anxiety which characterises the modern state of man is in fact the result of the fabrication of the idea of evil and sin while religion is no more than the will to power that redirects the natural deep-seated human search for peace and hope. Religion's masterstroke in Nietzsche's mind is its formulation of an existential problem coupled with its solution: God. In short, once Christianity had succeeded in making man neurotic, it then sold him its cure-all drug on which it owned the monopoly or, as de Gourmont put it, sold him very dearly the tickets of a lottery that would never be drawn. To refuse the

prescription of religion was tantamount to a life of lunacy and eternal unreason yet Nietzsche as much as de Gourmont saw that the participation in religious life was unreason incarnate, “an exhibition of madness”.

De Gourmont continues the medical metaphor when he writes of doctors, prescriptions, hallucinations and madness. Yet if religion’s primary function is to propose a remedy to a general existential malaise then the modern abolition of the deity does not remove the sickness but rather transfers the remedy from the divine to other powerful symbolic beings. The narrator in ‘The Man from the West’ says as much when he comments on de Gourmont’s freedom from the shackles of religion:

> These are words that liberate us from our chains. But, at the same time, they put new chains on us. Moreover, these new chains may be even stronger than the old ones. God has descended from billowy clouds into the intricacies of our nervous systems. And God is always there, under all sort of names. (ARZ15:258; 2011 p.264)

Here the chains of what might be called an existential bad faith are simply reinscribed in other agencies. In *Seihō no hito*, Akutagawa elaborates on the social function of religion as just one of several necessary modern regulating systems:

> Nietzsche called religion ‘hygienics.’ But it is not just religion – morality and economics were also ‘hygienics.’ (ARZ15:273; 2011 p.271)

Religion, capitalism, patriotism: such are the ideological hygienics at the heart of Akutagawa's understanding of culture.

What makes 'The Man from the West' the logical sequel to 'Horse Legs' and 'The Ball' respectively and what situates the work within a broader contemporary philosophical discourse is the confluence of cultural illusion, delusion, and national self-imagining. Akutagawa constantly returns to the ways in which authority is generated against its pendant, the spectre of delusion. We might call this the politics of narrative technique in the employ of the politics of morality. Our study of 'Horse Legs' demonstrated how accusations of delusion and insanity could be understood as attacks on hegemonic social norms and necessarily entailed stigma and ostracism. Delusion as the opposite of orthodoxy finds its complement in 'The Man from the West' which, in exploring faith as the intellectual overcoming of unreason positions heterodoxy in the politicised realm of insanity.

What is it that differentiates superstition from creed and delusion from reality? Papini had posed the same question and came to the most pragmatic conclusion that to attempt to differentiate what is sure from what is probable, what is historic from what is legendary is a hopeless undertaking which should be abandoned in favour of fine-tuning a style which will charm readers into conversion (1923, p.10). In Akutagawa's view the distinction between reality and delusion is fluid and owes more to persuasive presentation and a willingness to believe than any inherent truth. It had been playfully explored in his *kirishitan* stories which treat Christianity, especially in its Japanese

iteration.[150] Although these stories lie outwith our remit here, a brief note is pertinent if only to illustrate Akutagawa's understanding that the ontological workings of faith are unavoidably dependent on cultural subjectivity. Put simply, these works show that what we believe is dependent on our personal cultural experience and how strongly we believe depends on the romantic bent or otherwise of our imagination.[151]

Freud saw religion as mass delusion *par excellence*. In *Civilisation and its Discontents* (2004 [1930]), he takes up a thread previously explored by thinkers as diverse as Lombroso, Sorel, Bakunin and Arnold who held that religion, being a common delusion – unverifiable and yet irrefutable – derives from a larger social desire for community but with the unavoidable disadvantage of proceeding through infantilism and intimidation of the intelligence:

> The religions of mankind must be described as examples of mass delusion. Of course no one who still shares a delusion will ever recognise it as such. (p.23)

[150] Rebecca Suter's work (2013) on the *kirishitan monogatari* bears curious and plentiful lines of enquiry. Interrogating the status and reception of Christianity and western thought in Japan in the Taishō period, her research brings to light often fraught questions about cosmopolitanism and national identity in an increasingly transnational world of mass communications.

[151] Such a point is conveyed in *Tabako to akuma* (*Tobacco and the Devil*, 1916) which explores the question of whether or not the devil brought tobacco to Japan. Reaching the island, the devil is disappointed that what he finds bears no resemblance to what he had read in Marco Polo's *Travels*. There is not a single believer for him to tempt: "What with his being the devil and all, this perplexed him a little" and he eventually turns to gardening at which point any historical traces of his movements become somewhat sketchy. There are many more striking examples of the importance of romance / delusion in bolstering belief in Akutagawa's works and many with an explicitly religious flavour: 'The Christ of Nanking', 1920, 'The Life of a Holy Fool', 1919 and 'A Civilisation Murder' are works of particular interest.

As a motif and as a narrative technique the idea of madness allows the writer to explore notions of credibility and credulousness as well as operations of power and control. The penumbra between faith and fanaticism to which the narrator of 'The Man from the West' alluded in his opening paragraph may be exemplified in *Kaika no satsujin* (*A Civilisation Murder,* 1919) in which a Meiji Japanese is converted to Christianity by Henry Townsend, a British missionary. Convinced of the will of divine providence, his misreading of the Scriptures convinces him to murder his amorous rival. Like a schizophrenic, the protagonist believes that he is guided by another: "I will act in the name of God according to His will" (ARZ3:220) and he looks for signs in his everyday life to confirm what he wants to believe. The story is coloured by his constant anxiety of being taken for a madman: "You must believe me. […] you must not take this to be the fruitless delirious mutterings of a madman" (ARZ3:217).

The mental asylum looms large and gloomily in *Kappa* (1927) and the outspoken critic Mag is literally silenced by an act of violence. In a similar vein, Ambrose Bierce, much admired and referred to by Akutagawa, deplored the closing down of spaces for social criticism in modern American society and lamented the universal obsolescence of satire and its subsequent marginalisation as uncivic and unhealthy. He too pointed to the incursion of medical language to classify, quarantine and immunise those voices which did not concur with hegemonic ideology, noting that the modern age was one that held crime to be a disease and converted the prison into a sanatorium (*The Opinionator* 1966 [1911], p.281).

In our study of 'Horse Legs' we explored how notions of civilisation and modernity were held to be synonymous with rationality, enlightenment and

progress[152]. Yet, one culture's faith may be another society's delusion: since beliefs originate against the backdrop of a shared, social world, a sense of belonging to a public world is integral to the sense of reality. Akutagawa muses on the cultural backdrop essential for collective faith when he writes in 'A Dwarf's Words':

> We do not choose our faith at the window of Mitsukoshi. What controls our faith is a vogue always difficult to understand. Or possibly our likes and dislikes resemble divine will. (ARZ13:36)

Rather like the objective tone of the narrator who presents the reality of Hanzaburō's horse legs, the givenness of Christ's thaumaturgy in 'The Man from the West' is not initially discredited and the problem is more one of persuasion rather than truth:

> Christ revealed his heavenly gifts when he was a mere child of twelve years. But even after his baptism, there was no one who would become his disciple. Walking from village to village, he must have felt lonely. But finally a group of four disciples—four fishermen—began to follow him. (ARZ15:253; 2011 p.261)

Christ needed believers to confirm and propagate his truth / delusion. Renan makes an interesting commentary on Christ's miracles and by doing so inscribes the Christian story in a history of progress: he seems to doubt that

[152] Josephson describes the Meiji drive to equate local superstitious customs with madness, citing as an example the new classification in 1885 of fox possession as a mental illness (2012, p.185). Akutagawa often refers to the quiet lunacy of his mother as for instance in *Tenkibo* (*Death Register*, 1926) in which the pictures she draws always have fox faces.

Christ actually performed miracles, preferring the argument that because the people, superstitious and unenlightened, wanted to believe that he did, this myth became a reality:

> Miracles only happen at those times and in those countries where they are believed, where there are people who are disposed to believe in them. […] Most often it is the people themselves who, since they need to constantly see something divine in great events and great men, create marvellous legends after the event. (1863, pp.51–2)

Renan does not dispute Christ's divine inspiration but he suggests that he took advantage of the credulousness of his disciples who were, according to him, ignorant, simple-minded and believed in spectres and spirits. The same was true of the masses: because Jesus wanted to convert them to his cause, he did not contradict them in their understanding of his magical powers and let them believe (pp.162–6). In this way, the famous line from Matthew 5:3 which Renan quotes in this context becomes a pragmatic, even Machiavellian political statement: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven".

Renan goes on to explain that Jesus chose to preach his message by way of parables because it was in this child-like and imaginative form that the people, who were mostly very dim, grasped his message most clearly (p.164). Since they wanted to believe his message they then made up stories such as the tale of his supernatural birth in Bethlehem. Renan concludes that: "there has never been a great event in history which has not given rise to a cycle of fables and Jesus would not have been able to, even had he wanted to, cut short these

popular creations" (p.241).[153] Since these people were Orientals - passionate and unreasonable - they were easily converted and Jesus was, Renan argues, complicit in the illusion, realising that two modes of presentation would strengthen the mission, namely miracles and prophecy (p.255). In this way Renan indicates the manner in which Jesus manufactured a shared delusion and he alludes to the fact that at times his disciples feared he was mad, so fanatical was he about his message (p.326).

The status of Christ's miracles is taken up in 'The Man from the West' and the narrator seems to echo Renan when he notes: "That this was also considered at the time a scientific truth is indisputable." Strikingly however, it is the link between the act of writing and the act of conversion through the miracle of faith which is highlighted in Akutagawa's text:

> Christ performed miracles from time to time. But for him such acts were easier than to compose a single metaphor. For that reason *too* he had an aversion to miracles. For that reason *too*—it was in teaching his Way that he felt his mission most strongly. Christ's performing miracles, as Rousseau roared to a later generation, was no doubt a hindrance to his teaching the Way. But his "sheep" constantly expected miracles from him. Christ found himself forced to comply with about one request in every three. (ARZ15:255; 2011 p.262)

In this passage, the narrator does not question the veracity or otherwise of Christ's performance of miracles but he sees it as merely the adjunct to his main mission, that of ideological conversion. The reference to the masses as sheep implies their stupidity and readiness to believe. The dry assertion that

Christ complied with about one request in three is hilariously unsubstantiated and leads the reader to wonder at other of the narrator's bold claims. In the sequel the narrator goes on to explain that the reason Christ's disciples could not understand him was that he was "too much a man of culture" (ARZ15:287; 2011 p.278). This focus on Christ's facility with metaphor highlights Christ's brilliance as poet, artistically conditioning his followers to acts of faith.

At the beginning of our chapter, we noted Akutagawa's interest in Christ as the exemplification of the pathological mentality of all fanatics. Sired by the Holy Spirit, the narrator notes that Christ was touched by genius along with other artists, fanatics and madmen: "But the children of the Holy Spirit—all christs—run the risk of being possessed by it" (ARZ15:248; 2011 p.258). The narrator makes several references to these "other christs": Edgar Allen Poe, Walt Whitman, Moses, John the Baptist, Goethe and Lao-tzu, all of whom share a distinct poetic and radical vision. Convinced of his vision, Jesus created God in so far as he created within his followers the desire for God which is just as radical as Zarathustra who destroyed Him but who set himself in his stead. This fabrication of God, the fanatic's delusion, is the result of his being touched by the Holy Spirit:

> Christ became the prophet of his age. Yet at the same time he was at the mercy of the prophet within—or rather the Holy Spirit who had conceived him. We can sense him even in a moth burned by the flames of a candle. (ARZ15:263; 2011 p.266)

Furthermore, this creation of God gained purchase among people because it corresponded to a human desire for a higher power and the hope of consolation.

The narrator notes that: “Christ was the first person to awaken within us a desire for the kingdom of heaven” and in such a way Jesus is inscribed along with other christs in a series of inspired and possibly deluded artists in an aristocracy of bohemian genius which moved beyond conventional morality (ARZ15:257).

In the third entry, the narrator alludes to Cesare Lombroso whose work on artistic genius, understood as a form of hereditary insanity and a congenital mental abnormality, was influential in the development of criminology. Rather like the narrator of ‘The Man from the West’, Lombroso’s *The Man of Genius* (1889) groups together diverse historical example of genius: scientific, artistic, philosophical and political in order to create a taxonomy of monomania. Lombroso sees that there are those sane geniuses like Christ and Galileo who had a great gift which they realised perfectly. Other artistic geniuses, prophets and maniacs would be diagnosed by Lombroso as clinically insane, their divine gift notwithstanding. According to Lombroso, Pascal, Luther and Loyola all suffered from heretical ideas. Napoleon was an insane megalomaniac. Baudelaire and Coleridge were both anti-bourgeois bohemians, differing only in the expression of their perversion: the French poet was a sexual pervert and an alcoholic, while the English poet was addicted to morphine (1889, p.319).

Lombroso drew on the pioneering work of British psychiatrist Henry Maudsley who maintained in *Natural Causes and Supernatural Seemings* (1886) that the origin and sustenance of belief in the supernatural were the operations of a disordered mind whose symptoms were hallucinations and illusions, mania and delusions (p.162). Maudsley gives an example of such a delusion when he notes that a maniac may be convinced that he has heard a

voice from heaven or that he is in fact a prophet (p.169). Unlike Maudsley, Lombroso takes a moral and indeed ideological stance when it comes to monomaniacs as is evident from his categorisation of sane geniuses and insane geniuses. What separates the two camps is that the insane genius "is in a minority of one in his opinion" (p.244) and that of the sane geniuses, "not one of them allowed his great passion for truth and beauty to stifle the love of family and country" (p.353). On this reading, Hanzaburō would definitely be diagnosed as insane while that great proselytiser Jesus Christ is honoured as the greatest genius known to man – despite being seen as a treasonous anarchist by his contemporaries.

If, in 'The Man from the West', Christ is just another deluded genius suffering from a gigantic monomania in that "penumbral region" between soundness and unsoundness of mind (Maudsley 1886, p.159), then why is it that his teaching has long been held as true when that of other christs has been denied or ignored? That Christ was not in a minority of one but that he so effectively won disciples and fanatical converts to his cause is the logical conclusion we can extract from Maudsley, Lombroso, Renan, Nietzsche and indeed Akutagawa in this text. Bakunin called religion a collective insanity, the more powerful because it is a "traditional folly and because its origin is lost in the most remote antiquity" (p. 68).

Christianity is the most interpellative of religions, centred as it is on the story of Christ which appealed to a suffering public. Bakunin mused that there must have been a very deep-seated dissatisfaction to secure acceptance of the most audacious and monstrous "Christian absurdity" which signalled the universal triumph of credulous stupidity over the mind of the masses (1970,

pp.76–7). Freud took the same idea and traced the psychological motivations and implications of Christian faith. In ‘A Dwarf’s Words’ Akutagawa makes links between religious vision and hallucination as in the entry on Buddha: “According to speculation, he was sunk in melancholia. … While trying to meditate he was tormented by the god of delusion” (ARZ13:50) and later hints at the reality of a race for persuasion in a relativist world which lacks intrinsic value: “like any form of taste, conscience has its pathological enthusiasts” (ARZ13:32). As Arnold had argued, in such a desacralised world what is important is creating and propagating faith even if manifestly based on delusions. This key idea brings us to our previous points: that in its propagation, Christianity has much in common with journalism and that its romantic, providential style is the key to its universal success and model for other successful ideologies.

So it is that throughout Akutagawa’s work and in ‘The Man from the West’ in particular, notions of delusion coincide with the force of the romantic and the mythic to shape and disseminate ideology. Akutagawa’s deft manipulation of a range of European thinkers and writers positions his thinking squarely within a wider cosmopolitan discursive field and sees a commonality in the ideological systems which form the basis of both European and Japanese modern society. Our focus on the claim to historical authority, the text’s position within the wider cultural economy as well as the diverse ends to which the Christian story has been harnessed has clearly shown that what concerns Akutagawa is not any sense of divine inspiration but rather the place of ideology in superintending the modern and ostensibly rational social sphere.

Conclusions

> I have told several lies. But when I'm writing, generally speaking, I chose my lies to be clumsy. ('A Dwarf's Words' – Posthumous Manuscript), ARZ16:84)

> Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it. (Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller*, 1936 quoted in Hale 2006, p.366.)

Our approach has been to look beyond those representations of Akutagawa which view him as inward-looking and uninterested in the state of the nation as a whole. We have found, on the contrary, an extremely engaged and critical writer. If we were to look beyond the works surveyed in our study here to a further piece which brings together the main ideas of our thesis, we would do well to study in depth the satirical story *Kappa* (1927). A dystopian vision, Kappa typically mixes realist devices with the fantastic to present a scathing criticism of all aspects of modern Japanese life including government, education, history, literature, the proletarian movement and colonialism. Doubts as to the narrator's soundness of mind lurk as a macabre metafictional trope in this powerful work written lucidly in the year of the author's suicide. Even a scant glance at this frame story serves to demonstrate that Akutagawa was clearly an important cultural and literary critic who was keenly engaged with the ideological debates of his day. Moreover, it puts paid to the idea that the author disappeared into a fragmented haze of disintegrated textuality towards the end of his life. Such a reading however lies beyond the scope of our current study which now draws to a close.

In our presentation of Akutagawa as a writer who was profoundly aware of the moral and ideological implications inherent in the act of reading and writing, it has been our aim to demonstrate that he goes beyond the effete art-for-art's-sake persona that he has often been made to assume. It is a metafictional irony that during his lifetime and especially since his suicide, Akutagawa has been made to embody various positionalities: the personification of the Taishō cosmopolitan in all his progressive, western-looking modernity; the hatefully withdrawn bourgeois aesthete, utterly divorced from the struggle of the common man; or the iconic, supremely national writer of a pure Japanese fiction. The irony of this constant reincarnation for such diverse, politically-loaded ends would not have been lost on Akutagawa who was deeply interested in the often oblique ways in which "culture" could be made to enshrine and promote certain ideological modes of behaviour.

As a cultural commentator, we have aimed to demonstrate that Akutagawa was acutely conscious of the tensions which existed within Taishō society. On the one hand we have witnessed his recognition of the burgeoning state and the development of an increasingly national subjectivity. On the other we have seen how he interacts as a writer with the fierce ideological battles at stake in the war of the "isms" – individualism, cosmopolitanism, socialism, nationalism and imperialism. We have been keen to illuminate his position on the emerging and ever narrower state-sponsored definition of acceptable social behaviour policed by the newly vocal middle classes. In these ways Akutagawa was, we have argued, most interested in the narratives that were being produced, disseminated and naturalised in the 1910s and 20s and their power to make people do things. Whether it was the myth of the age of the gods as the

foundation for the Japanese imperial imperative or the severe normativity of new middle-class notions of domesticity in order to proscribe antisocial behaviour, Akutagawa was conscious that the newly formed reading public were being conscripted to particular ideological positions.

Even more crucial, we have noted, was Akutagawa's constant preoccupation with the complicity between certain types of narrative form and the politics of cultural formation. We have argued that it is in his sustained attack on Realism as the style which characterised the Meiji and Taishō ages which is where Akutagawa's wider artistic and ideological import lies. It is in his consistently modernist drawing attention to the act *qua* act which is the most disarming feature of his work. In particular he saw how the Realist mode as it was being employed in the modern Japanese novel, came to be the means by which a new kind of middle-class subjectivity was disseminated and held sway, all the more powerful in its invisibility. His constant unpicking of the mimetic form and the revelation of the ideological forces at work behind this most insidious of styles characterises the entirety of his work.

We have argued that this Realist style not only exemplified the modern novel but also modern History, the writing of which, whether popular or scholarly, was hotly debated in the Taishō era. It is now an axiom of modern discourse that the writing of History tells us more about the concerns of the present than of the past but the battle for History and the need to centralise, nationalise and canonise a mode of historical writing in order to monopolise the present was one of Akutagawa's main concerns. Furthermore, we have seen how he was quick to point out the contradictions in the historical mode: of a mimetic historiography on the one hand and an impulse to mythologise on the other.

This recourse to myth both in school text books from the 1890s and national discourse in general was one of the more sinister rhetorical devices employed by the Japanese state and its spokesmen to create, condition and control a national mind-set. Crucially, we have also noted Akutagawa's concern that this narrative strategy was not only a preserve of national historians and the Ministry of Education, it was used in equal measure by the proletarian movement and that *Urform* of mystification, the Christian Church, both movements sharing a common narrative approach. Fundamental to all these preoccupations was the role of narrative in defining cultural values and the processes by which such hegemonic values are embedded, naturalised and become unopposable.

The premise of our study therefore has been to present Akutagawa neither as a canonical Japanese writer nor as a bourgeois aesthete but as a sharp and often prescient cultural critic who helps us understand the fraught ideological terrain of the Taishō era as it was being formed through his unpacking of the competing stories which were being told to co-opt and coerce. Coinciding with the advent of mass communications, this was the moment when the notion of the masses assumed a very modern hue: as something to be managed politically and manipulated commercially. If the Kōtoku High Treason Trial of 1911 was a crucial political turning point, following the mass arrest of left-thinking activists and the execution of twelve alleged conspirators, then it also marked a social and cultural hiatus in quickening a very urgent need to develop more effective methods of counteracting what were seen to be the dangerous effects of progressive politics. Dodd has shown how in the later 1920s, the Japanese state was taking "increasingly repressive measures against 'unhealthy' social elements both at home and abroad" and that the state

came to interpret “unhealthy bodies – be they communists, liberals or rebellious women – as detrimental to its fantasy of incorporating individual Japanese into a harmonious and single-minded body politic.” (2014, p.31). We need only glance at ‘The Quarrel of the Monkey and the Crab’, a disturbing and black-humoured rewriting of the famous children’s story in which the trial and summary execution of the crab is applauded in the popular press, to understand that the creature had been to some degree influenced by the dangerous thinking that was popular at the time.

The bifurcation of literature from the late 1910s into proletarian and “bourgeois” writing saw Akutagawa pigeonholed as a middle-class artist with little regard for wider social realities which would ironically become the basis for his posthumous resurrection in the 1930s and beyond. While Akutagawa was not adverse to the movement he intimated that literature, like education, academic discourse and mass communications are similar in their creation of dispositional values. As such, they can all be viewed as part of the same movement of affective and intellectual control of which he remained suspicious. It has been our contention that the aesthetic and ideological import of Akutagawa’s work has been largely overlooked in the strained oppositions between proletarian and “bourgeois” writing on the one hand and “pure literature” and the “pure novel” on the other. Hayter for example makes a very cogent case for the ideological and epistemological shift from the 1920s’ discursive creation of *junbungaku* (“pure literature”) associated with the confessional immediacy of the *shishōsetsu* to the so-called pure novel (*roman pur*), symptomatic of the autotelic modernist drive towards pure textuality (2014, pp.131–2). In this shift, critical attention has tended to focus on those so-called

avant-garde writers like Yokomitsu Riichi who attacked Naturalism in their contributions to the *Bungei Jidai* (*Literary Age*) journal at the expense of Akutagawa whose work may appear less polemical but is no less radical.[154]

However, might it be the case that Akutagawa sits somewhere between these two positions? In his unpicking of Realism as the ideological support for certain visions of reality and in his concentration on mediation rather than immediacy, he may be seen as a modernist writer. Rather than preserving the Romantic myth of the artist as bulwark against the debasement of mass culture, Akutagawa regularly draws attention to the writer's status within the operations of the capitalist economy. His is a realisation that even if it were desirable, escape from the modern world with all its inherent debasement and degradation to a purely aesthetic realm is merely another instance of the strength of the mythic over the individual. If it is true that "Life is not worth a single line of Baudelaire" then it is a romanticism aware of its own artifice and limits. Akutagawa was a supremely well-read writer who clearly valued art without losing sight of its indivisible situatedness. His famous axiom about Baudelaire has to be read in conjunction with the following advice for living in the real world, taken from the passage entitled 'Sekenchi' 'Worldly Wisdom' in 'A Dwarf's Words':

> The secret to worldly success is to live without contradicting social convention while scorning social convention. (ARZ13:96)

[154] See for instance Hayter's 2014 treatment of Ishikawa Jun's 1936 work *Fugen*.

As an engaged writer, Akutagawa does not disappear into an aura of mysterious textuality but rather uses his questioning of representation precisely to position it more squarely within the political context of his day. Following Rorty (1989, p.73), Akutagawa may perhaps best be viewed as an ironist since he continued to have radical and continuing doubts about the “final vocabulary” he used, having been impressed by other vocabularies he had encountered in his wide readings of the world. His monumentalised suicide notwithstanding, he does not advocate an artistic withdrawal from the world in an aestheticised apotheosis but rather, following his hero Montaigne, he remains a sceptic, keen to the end to draw attention to the constructedness of a reality which appears auratic.

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